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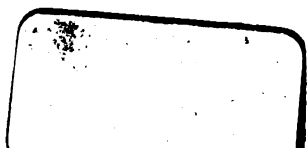
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KISSING THE ROD.

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KISSING THE ROD.

A Novel.

BY

EDMUND YATES,

AUTHOR OF "BROKEN TO HARNESS," "RUNNING THE GAUNTLET,"
"LAND AT LAST," ETC.

• "The heart knoweth its own bitterness."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.
1866.

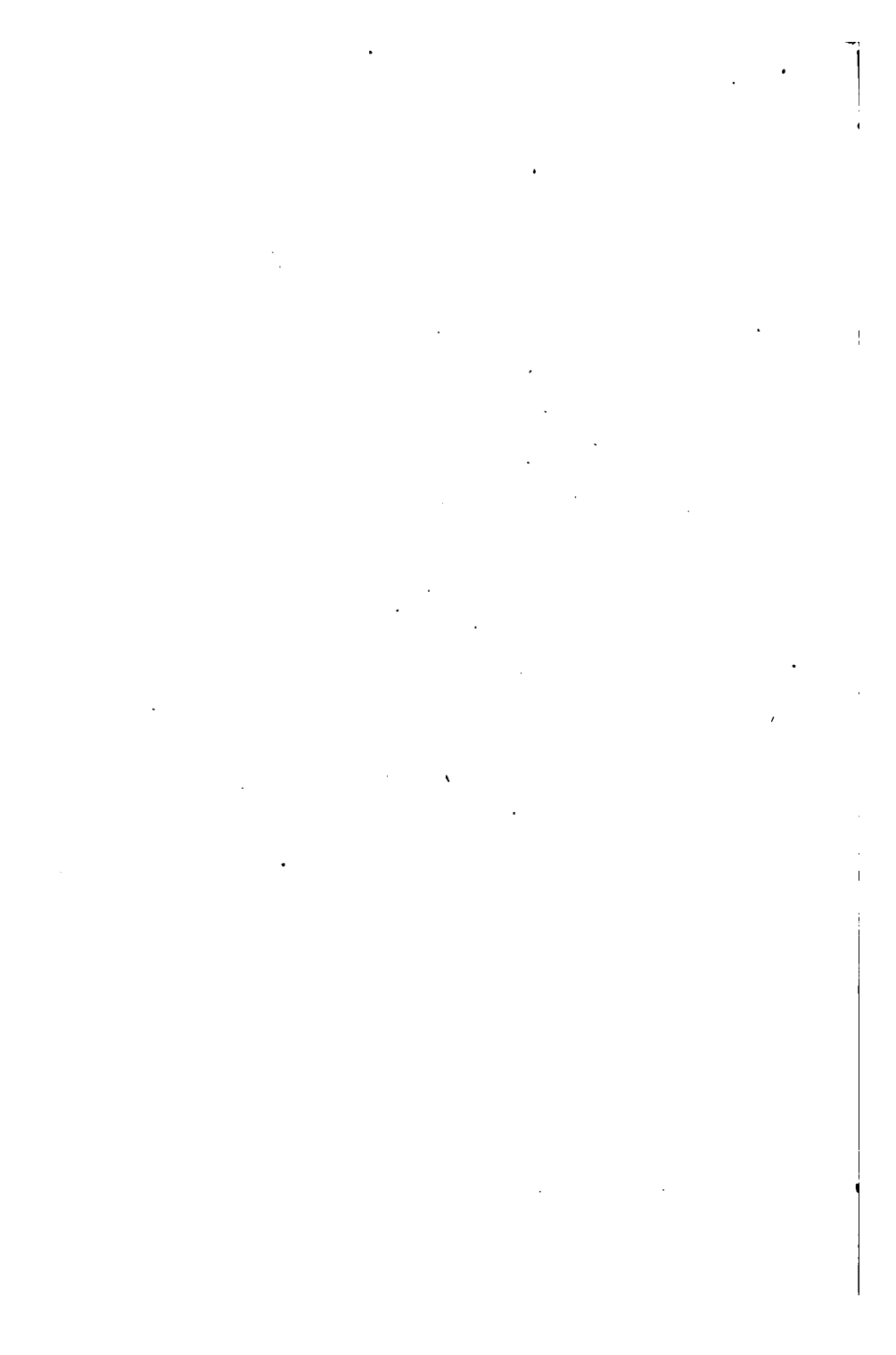
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250. f. 258.



Inscribed to

THE COUNTESS OF FIFE.



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KISSING THE ROD.

CHAPTER I.

DAZZLED.

THERE was no name on the doorposts, nothing beyond the number—"48"—to serve as a guide; and yet it may be doubted whether any firm in the City was better known to the postman, the bankers'-clerks, and all who had regular business to transact with them, than that of Streightley and Son. The firm had been Streightley and Son, and it had been located at 48 Bullion Lane, for the last hundred and fifty years. They were money-brokers and scrip-sellers at the time of the South-Sea bubble, and were among the very few who were not ruined by that disastrous

swindle. So little ruined were they that they prospered by it, and in the next generation extended their business and enlarged their profits; both of which, however, were considerably curtailed by rash speculations during the French Revolution and the American War. Within the first quarter of the present century the business of Streightley and Son recovered itself; and, under the careful management of old Sam Streightley and his head clerk, Mr. Fowler, the house became highly esteemed as one of the safest bill-broking establishments in the City. It was not, however, until young Mr. Robert, following the bounden career of all the eldest sons of that family, joined the business, and, after close application, had thoroughly mastered its details, that fortune could be said to have smiled steadily on the firm. Young Mr. Robert's views were so large and his daring so great, that his father, old Mr. Sam, at first stood aghast, and had to be perpetually supplicated before he gave permission to experiment on the least hazardous of all the young man's suggestions; but after the son had been

about two years a partner in the firm it happened that the father was laid up with such a terrible attack of gout as to be incapable of attending to business for months; and when he at length obtained the physician's grudging assent to his visiting the City he found things so prosperous, but withal so totally changed, that the old gentleman was content to jog down to Bullion Lane about three times a month until his death, which was not long in overtaking him.

Prosperous and changed! Yes; no doubt about that. Up that staircase, hitherto untrodden save by merchants'-clerks leaving bills for acceptance or notices of bills due; by stags with sham prospectuses of never-to-be-brought-out companies; or by third-rate City solicitors giving the quasi-respectability of their names to impotent semi-swindles, which, though they would never see the light, yet afforded the means for creating an indisputable and meaty bill of costs;—up that staircase now came heavy magnates of the City, directors of the Bank of England, with short ill-made Oxford-mixture trousers, and puckered

coats, and alpaca umbrellas; or natty stock-brokers, most of them a trifle horsy in garb, all with undeniable linen, and good though large jewelry, carefully-cultivated whiskers, and glossy boots. In the little waiting-room might be found an Irish member of Parliament; the managing director of a great steam-shipping company; a West-end dandy, with a letter of introduction from some club acquaintance with a handle to his name, who idiotically imagined that that handle would serve as a lever to raise money out of Robert Streightley; a lawyer or two; and occasionally the bronzed captain of a steamer arrived with news from the Pacific; or some burnt and bearded engineer fresh from the inspection of a silver mine in Central America. A long purgatory, for the most part, did these gentlemen spend in the little waiting-room, or in the clerk's room beyond it, where they were exposed to the sharp fusilade of Mr. Fowler's eyes and the keen glances of the two young men who assisted him. The only people who were shown by the messenger at once into Mr. Streightley's

presence were the City editors of the various newspapers, and a very prettily-appointed young gentleman, wise withal beyond his years, who occasionally drove down to Bullion Lane from Downing Street in a hansom cab, and who was private secretary to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Robert Streightley had done all this by his own talent and exertion—"on his own hook," as the Stock Exchange men phrased it. The keenness of his business intellect was astounding. He seemed to sift a proposition as it was being laid before him; and as soon as the proposer ceased speaking, Robert Streightley closed with or pooh-poohed the offer, with incontrovertible reasons for his decision. He spoke out plainly and boldly before the oldest and the youngest who sought his advice; he was neither deferential nor patronising; and never sought to please—simply for the sake of pleasing—any of his clients. The young men looked up to him in wonder, and spoke of him over mid-day chops and sherry as a "cool card," a "long-headed chap," "just about one," and in other compli-

mentary slangisms. The older men scarcely knew what to make of him; they hated him for his daring and success, for the dashing manner in which he was passing them all in the race for wealth and distinction; and they would have well liked to have shrugged their shoulders and hinted about his being "fast," and "going ahead," and finally making a grand smash of it; but they had no pretext. So long as Robert Streightley's business relations were thoroughly sound and wholesome it would have been against that *esprit de corps* which largely prevails among City men to breathe a word against him; and as for his private life, they could scarcely bring a charge of reckless extravagance against a man who went home to a seventy-pound-a-year house at Brixton in the "Paragon" omnibus, and there indulged in the dissipation of a "meat-tea" in the society of his mother and sister. So they found another vent for their spleen, and talked of him as a "doosid close-fisted fellow," a "mean narrow-minded hunks," and a "niggardly screw." He merited none of these appellations. He was a

straightforward, honourable business-man, bred in a narrow circle, which his own innate business habits were narrowing year by year. As a boy he had had instilled into him the value of money and the secret of money-getting; as a young man the whole scope of his faculties had been directed to this end. Such little fancy as he possessed—and with such a father the smallness of that fancy could be easily divined—had been ruthlessly eradicated, and all the nascent tendencies of his mind had been directed into one strong channel of fact. That Jack had ever found giants to slay, that glass slippers were ever worn by cinder-wenches, or pumpkins could by any possibility become carriages, were fictions not to be found in Bonnycastle and ignored by Walkinghame; but that two and two made four, or that a talent of silver hid in a napkin remained an unproductive talent of silver, whereas a hundred pounds invested in Consols produced yearly three pounds as interest to its holder, were as demonstrable as the light and heat of the sun at noon-day.

He lived but for his business, nothing else. He was in his office at ten o'clock, and he never left it, save on some business errand, until six. He never took a holiday except on Christmas-day and Good Friday, when the newspapers proclaimed all business suspended; he never dined out save twice or thrice a-year at the anniversary banquets of the directors of some of those companies in which his stake was large. His enemies wronged him when they said he had no heart. He had sincerely grieved for the old father who had brought him up and loved him deeply in his own peculiar way; his purse-strings were always at the command of those good Samaritans on the Stock Exchange who do so much in such a quiet and unassuming manner; and the clergyman at Brixton knew he might always count upon Mr. Streightley for a handsome subscription to any charity brought under his notice. His manner was odd and *brusque*, arising partly from his preoccupation, partly from his having never mixed in society; but there was nothing pretentious or vulgar, fast or underbred in him: he might have

been thought an oddity ; he never could have been set down for a snob.

See him now as he sits at his desk, poring over his diary, a tall strongly-built man, with long limbs lacking in due amount of muscular development from want of exercise. With a high forehead, a head prematurely bald, but surrounded with a thick fringe of brown hair, with sharp gray eyes looking out from overhanging brows, a thinly-cut aquiline nose, and rather full lips. He has a full whisker, after the ordinary respectable "mutton-chop" outline, and might, if he so pleased, have a large beard, as you can tell by the dark-blue outline round his chin ; but Robert Streightley would as soon think of coming up to town outside the Paragon omnibus in a turban as of committing any such unbusiness-like atrocity as growing a beard. One other person is in the room with him just now—Mr. Fowler, his chief clerk, known in the City as Downy Fowler ; an old gentleman, who is looked upon as the essence of knowingness, and to whom the fortunes of Streightley and Son are not a

little attributable. When this is hinted at, old Mr. Fowler smiles enigmatically; but only in strictest confidence, and to one or two very old friends, declares that, whatever he might have been to the old gentleman, he does not pretend to hold a candle to Mr. Robert, "whose head, my dear sir, is some-thing won-der-ful!" A short sleek gray-headed man, Mr. Fowler; with a high-collared coat much too long in the sleeves, a waistcoat with traces of bygone snuff-pinches lingering in the creases, gray trousers, and gaiter boots. A silent little man, rarely speaking, but in the habit of calling his principal's attention to matters under consideration, such as letters, invoices, and share-lists, with his pointed forefinger. That forefinger was at work at the very moment when they are first presented to the reader. It rested on an entry in the diary, and Mr. Fowler looked up into his principal's face inquiringly.

"Well?" said Robert Streightley, "I see. Markwell, 1350*l.*; Baxter, 870*l.*; Currie and Tull, 340*l.*; Guyon, 180*l.* 17*s.* 3*d.*; Banks, 97*l.* 6*s.*

Total, 2888*l.* 3*s.* 3*d.*—paid to us by Davidson—due to-day—what of that?”

Mr. Fowler did not answer, but placed his forefinger more decidedly on one of the items of the account.

“O, I see,” said Streightley; “Guyon’s acceptance! Ay, ay; I recollect now. You called my attention to that, and declared that it was doubtful at the time that Davidson paid it in. Of course you made inquiries?”

Mr. Fowler nodded.

“And they were unsatisfactory? Well, that’s no matter to us. The usual notice has been served, of course? Very well, we look to Davidson; but let Boswell’s people have the usual instructions to proceed. So Tierra del Fuegos stand the same, do they? All right then; hold on. Ocean Marine have gone up; so that advance to Walton and Pycroft is well covered. Let Brattle step round to—well, what is it, Brattle?” this to the junior clerk, who, after knocking at the door, entered the room.

“A lady, sir, to speak with you,” said Mr.

Brattle, in whom his brother lunch-*convives* at the Bay Tree would scarcely have recognised the youth who now stood blushing before his principal.

“A lady! to speak with me?”

“With Messrs. Streightley and Son, sir, she said, and in private, sir.”

“Must be some mistake,” said Robert Streightley. “Never mind. Show the lady in through the private door, Mr. Brattle. Leave me, Fowler, and don’t let any one in till I ring.”

If Mr. Fowler could have expressed astonishment, he would have done so, for never had woman entered that sanctum since he had been connected with Streightley and Son. But his training did not admit of any such vagary; so he retired without a word, and the door closed behind him as Mr. Brattle admitted the visitor into Robert Streightley’s presence.

Robert Streightley, who had been pretending to be absorbed in the diary, looked up, and carefully scrutinised his visitor. She was a girl of

about twenty, above the ordinary height, slightly and gracefully built. She threw up her veil as she entered, without the smallest sign of coquetry, and showed a strikingly-handsome face, very pale, with greenish-gray eyes, delicate Grecian nose, small white forehead, over which her dark-brown hair was drawn in flat bands, short upper lip, and small rounded chin. She was dressed in a dark-brown silk, with a black-lace cloak; and Streightley—usually unobservant of such things—noticed the wonderful fit of her lavender gloves. Streightley rose as she entered, and pointing to the usual client's chair, begged her to be seated. She bowed, and seated herself. Then there was a little pause, and Robert said, "You wished to see me, I believe?"

"You are Messrs. Streightley and Son?" said the lady interrogatively, in a musical but slightly timid voice.

"I am Mr. Streightley, the representative of the firm."

"That is what I wished to know," she replied a little haughtily. "Of course I—what I would

ask is—I am not accustomed to business terms
—You are the—the person—who sent this?”

She laid her parasol on the table as she spoke, and took from the purse which she carried in her hand a small printed paper. Glancing at it, Robert Streightley saw that it was an ordinary commercial document, intimating to Edward Scrope Guyon, of 110 Queen Anne Street, that a bill for 180*l.* 17*s.* 3*d.*, drawn on him by Davidson Brothers, lay due at Streightley and Son's, 48 Bullion Court, Lombard Street. As he returned it to her he said, “It is quite right; it was sent out by this house. It is the usual notice given in such cases, stating where the money is to be paid.”

She was very pale as she said, “It means then that money—that the amount named—must be paid?”

“It does indeed.”

“And at once?”

“This is the day for payment,” said Streightley. Then noticing her deadly pallor, and the trembling of her lips, he said: “May I ask how this came into your hands?”

With a visible effort at self-control, the young lady replied: "I—I should have mentioned it before. I am Miss Guyon, daughter of Mr. Guyon, to whom that paper is addressed."

She hesitated for a minute, and Streightley, whose eyes were fixed intently on her face, said:

"Ye-es! I think I understand; and he has sent you here to—"

"My father is not in the habit of sending me about on his business-errands, sir!" interrupted Miss Guyon, flushing scarlet. (Robert thought that in his life he had never seen any thing so lovely as she looked, with heightened colour, swelling nostril, and curved lip.) "Mr. Guyon is out of town on—on very important and pressing business; and as he will not be back until late at night, I thought it best to come here to explain his absence, which will account for the money not being ready."

"Which will account for the money not being ready!" repeated Mr. Streightley absently. "O, of course, of course. Pray do not say another word about it, Miss Guyon. I am very sorry

that you should have had the trouble of coming here, except that it—it has procured me the—the great pleasure of seeing you!” (Robert had never before paid a woman a compliment, and was horribly awkward in his first attempt.) “I’ll call on Mr. Guyon to-morrow morning about eleven, and—”

“And you’ll bring your bill with you, will you?” said Miss Guyon with supreme *hauteur*.

The word “bill” was in itself always disagreeable to her; but she had no idea but that this was an ordinary tradesman’s account, and thought Robert Streightley was the tradesman to whom it was owing. 3

“Ye-es!” said he; “I’ll bring the bill with me, and—”

“There is nothing more to be said, I think,” interrupted Miss Guyon. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, Miss Guyon. Permit me to see you downstairs.”

She did not speak; but he construed a very slight bow into a gesture of assent, and proceeded down the staircase. Arrived at the door he called

the cabman, who was slumbering on his box ; but the man's movements being slow, Streightley opened the cab-door himself, and bareheaded held it as Miss Guyon, with just the style of acknowledgment that she would have given to the shop-walker who handed her a chair at a linendraper's, passed in. Old Mr. Pommylow, chairman of the West India Plantation Company, who was crossing the street at the time, gave him a great nod and a sly wink ; and made them all laugh at the Board five minutes afterwards, by telling them he'd seen Bob Streightley "doing the polite to a doosid fine gal."

She was gone ; but Robert Streightley still stood on the pavement, gazing after the cab that had carried her off. Then, after a minute, he turned slowly round and retraced his steps up the staircase, pondering over the interview.

After remaining for about half-an-hour in a brown study, he touched the small handbell by which he was accustomed to summon Mr. Fowler, and, without raising his head, said to that worthy gentleman when he entered :

"Give me that acceptance we were speaking of, please."

"Guyon's acceptance do you mean, sir?"

"Mr. Guyon's, if you please," said Streightley rather sternly, the familiarity jarring on his ear.

"Will you want the others, sir?" asked the old man. "Markwell's and Banks's are paid; but they haven't sent about the others yet."

"Only Mr. Guyon's, thank you, Fowler. I—I want to make a few inquiries about it."

"I don't expect you'll hear much good of the acceptor, sir," said old Fowler with twinkling eyes. "I suspect it's one of Davidson's private discounts, and we know what they are—he, he!" and the old gentleman laughed quietly.

"Let me have the letters, if you please, Mr. Fowler, and any thing else there may be for signature. I shall be going soon."

"Going, sir!" said old Fowler in the greatest astonishment. He had never known Mr. Robert leave before six o'clock since he had been in the business, and now it was only four.

"Yes! I'm not very well. I think I want a little fresh air, so I shall go and get it. And I shall probably not be here till twelve to-morrow, Mr. Fowler."

"Very well, sir." He said it most mechanically. If the equestrian statue of the Duke of Wellington had descended from its pedestal and cantered up Threadneedle Street, Mr. Fowler would have been scarcely more astonished.

Mr. Robert Streightley went in search of fresh air through Holborn and Oxford Street to the West-end. He so rarely quitted the City, he was so seldom out any where in the daylight, that the bright sun and the splendid shops, the pleasure-seeking crowds idling through the streets, the handsome carriages, and the general life and bustle amazed, and under any other circumstances would have amused him. Even now he felt that he was wasting his life, letting his days pass by without any adequate enjoyment, and he determined that to a certain extent he would remedy that for the future by curtailing the

hours devoted to his business, which had hitherto had his every energy. At the Regent Circus he paused and asked his way to Queen Anne Street; for he had determined to see the house where dwelt his lovely visitor of the morning. How lovely she was, and how confused and ridiculous she must have thought him; how different in manner to those with whom she was in the habit of associating; and how delightfully ignorant she was of all business-matters! He wondered whether he should see her the next day when he called on her father. He would like to see her again, he thought; and what would he not give to be able to talk to her, and to get her to talk to him unreservedly, as no doubt she did to—to those of her own class! Yes, there was some good in his money and his business, after all. They had brought him in contact with this lovely girl; and in his transactions with her father he might perhaps be able to get to know her on other terms than those of mere business acquaintance. That was the house, No. 110, with traces of her presence

in the lovely flowers in the balcony, and in the splendid Indian work-box standing on the gilt table in the drawing-room window. A handsome house, looking like the expenditure of two thousand a-year at least, Streightley thought to himself; the expenditure, mind, not the income,—his business education had taught him to look at those matters in their right light; and he remembered what Fowler had said about Mr. Guyon, and knew that the old clerk never spoke at random. A carriage was at the door of No. 110; and a footman standing by it said to his mistress as Streightley passed, “Not at home, my lady. Ridin’ with Miss Wentworths and the Major in the Park.” Not at home! that of course meant the lady of the house. But was there a Mrs. Guyon, or did the young lady whom he had seen do the honours of her father’s house? He should imagine so; for she had come alone, and mentioned nothing of her mother. Riding in the Park, eh? Then he might have a chance of seeing her again! The Park was free to all, any one might go there, and—and the

Major! who was the Major? Robert Streightley's spirits fell to zero again, as he remembered Miss Guyon's manner to him that morning, and reflected how wide was the gulf between them.

He asked his way to the Park, and took up his position by the railings near the Achilles statue, gazing round him in wonder at all he saw and heard. The easy familiarity of the conversation between the ladies in the carriages, or on the chairs, and the gentlemen attendant on them was very different from the prim politeness of Peckham, or the boisterous *bonhomie* of Brixton; and he was particularly struck with the general acquaintance that nine-tenths of the people lounging about seemed to have with each other. Robert felt painfully out of his sphere; he imagined that he was stared at as an interloper. For a long time he could not muster up courage to take his place at the railings, until he saw two carpenters returning from work in their flannel jackets, stop for a minute to look at the passing pageant, and take up their position at the railings, next to an

old gentleman with a very blue coat, and a very red face, who turned round and muttered something about "d—d impudence," which delighted the carpenters immensely. When they moved off, with grins at the old gentleman which reduced him to the verge of apoplexy, Robert slipped into the place they had left vacant, and remained there for some time, gazing in wonder at all he saw, and wishing—O, how fervently wishing!—to see *her* again.

At last his perseverance was rewarded. In the midst of a large cavalcade which came sweeping out of the Row, turning their horses' heads towards the Marble Arch, sat Miss Guyon, looking, in her neat hat, with her hair drawn off her face and gathered into a large knot behind, even more lovely than she had looked in the morning. Streightley's heart beat hard, and his mouth grew dry as he recognised her. As she rode past, her glance fell upon him, but she did not take the smallest notice of him; merely shifting her whip as she held out her pretty little gauntleted hand to a young man riding between her and the rail-

ings, and who, as he lifted his hat in adieu, said, "Will you be at the Opera to-night?"

She replied, "At the Opera! O yes; box No. 70. Shall we see you?"

"Delighted!" he replied, bowing low, and turning his horse's head. "Good day, Major!" and as the old gentleman on the other side of Miss Guyon acknowledged his salute, the young man turned his horse's head and rode away.

"At the Opera! she was going to the Opera!" Robert Streightley found himself vaguely repeating these words as he hurried down Piccadilly. He left the Park so soon as the cavalcade of which Miss Guyon formed part had passed out of sight. Good heavens, how lovely she was! how unlike any thing he had ever seen before! how elegant and graceful! He remembered noticing how closely her dark-blue riding-habit fitted her, and he could see the pretty dogskin gauntlet as she put out her hand to—Ay, who was that she shook hands with? Not the Major; he was the old gentleman. Who was that who asked her if she were going to the Opera, and—? What on

earth was it to him? he was nothing to Miss Guyon; very probably he should never see her again, and—Yes. He stopped suddenly in his hurried walk. Yes; he would see her again, and that night too. He had never been to the Opera; but any one could go there by paying; and, if he could not speak to her, he should at least be able to gaze upon her lovely face. He was a fool, and was losing his senses. What would they say in the City if they knew of this egregious folly? Here was a man of six-and-thirty running about, like a schoolboy in his calf-love, after a girl whom he had only seen that morning, and had scarcely spoken to! It was very ridiculous, he acknowledged, and he would give it up. He would just call on Mr. Guyon in the way of business in the morning because he had promised to do so, and the affair would be at an end. But he thought he would go to the Opera that night. You see, he had never been there, and had often wanted to know what the place was like.

He went into a well-known dining establishment and had some dinner, and—an unusual

thing with him—drank a pint of wine. He had learned of the waiter what time the Opera commenced ; and as soon as the clock-hands reached half-past seven he hurried off and presented himself at the pit entrance, where, on account of his morning costume, he was refused admittance. He was told, however, that there would be no obstacle to his admission into the amphitheatre ; and he accordingly climbed into that wild region, and there secured a front seat. He had hired a glass from the check-taker, and with it he now proceeded to scan the house, as yet cold and nearly empty. Miss Guyon was not there. The opera commenced, and still she did not arrive. Streightley, plying his glass at two minutes' intervals, at length saw her advance to the front of a box on the first tier and take the seat with her back to the stage. With her was the lady whom he had seen in the carriage at the door in Queen Anne Street ; and they had scarcely been seated ten minutes before they were joined by the young man who had been of Miss Guyon's party in the Park. Streightley recognised him in an instant,

and hated him for his easy manners and his good looks; for he was a good-looking young fellow of six-and-twenty, with fair hair parted in the middle, regular features, and brilliant teeth. Other men visited the box during the evening, but this young fellow only went away once, and then Streightley saw him in the stalls with his glass rivetted on Miss Guyon, who, as he also remarked, attracted a great deal of attention. Then he returned to the box and remained there during the rest of the evening, until nearly the close of the opera, indeed, when Streightley saw the party preparing to move. Robert instantly seized his hat, and rushing downstairs arrived at the door in time to hear loud shouts of "Lady Henmarsh's carriage stops the way!" and to see the visitor of the morning on the arm of an old gentleman, and Miss Guyon closely escorted by the fair-haired equestrian. As she stepped into the carriage Miss Guyon looked up at her attendant cavalier with a smile that Robert Streightley would at that instant have sacrificed all his wealth to have had directed at him. He was mad with rage and jeal-

ousy, and could have struck down the simpering fool, who muttered something inaudible under his breath, and raised his hat as the carriage drove off.

What had he said in return for that look? That Robert Streightley could never know. Who was he who created the first pang of jealousy that had ever rankled in Streightley's heart? That he would learn at once; he would follow the man, and see where he lived, and learn who he was.

The young man lit a cigar and strolled leisurely eastward. Following him at a little distance, Streightley never took his eyes from him, saw him stop at the Temple gate, and reached the door as it closed behind him. To the porter Mr. Streightley gave the name of an acquaintance who resided in Brick Court, and on being admitted saw his quarry just a-head of him. He needed caution now, for theirs were the only footsteps that echoed through the courts; but the young man, without looking round, made his way to Crown-Office Row, and entered one of the end houses nearest the river. Streightley entered after

him, and remained at the bottom of the staircase listening to his ascending footsteps, which paused when they reached the topmost story; and then the listener heard the grating of a key in a lock, and afterwards the clanging of a closing door. He waited a few minutes, and then crept softly to the highest story, where were two sets of chambers. One set, as announced by a painted tin placard, was to let; over the other were painted the names of Mr. Gordon Frere and Mr. Charles Yeldham.

CHAPTER II.

A MORNING CALL.

AT nine o'clock the next morning, an hour later than his usual time, Robert Streightley entered his little dining-room and sat down to breakfast. He looked pale and fatigued; and there was an unnatural and unusual brightness in his eyes that at once attracted the notice of old Alice, who had been the nurse of his childhood, and was now the housekeeper and confidential servant of the little family. The old lady was jealously careful of the health of "her boy," as she always spoke of him, and was accustomed to use the license of tongue allowed her in many caustic remarks. She came into the room just as Robert seated himself at the table, and at once commenced to address him in her least conciliatory manner.

"O, you have got down at last, have you, Master Robert? I thought you was never com-

ing, and there you might have lied before I'd have come up to help you! That's what I say, and what I mean."

"What's the matter, Alice? you don't seem pleased this morning."

"Pleased? Who should be pleased, and a lovely steak and mushrooms left to burn itself away to a cinder, and you never coming home to dinner. To dinner, indeed!—not coming home till all hours of the night. I heard your key in the lock, though you thought I was asleep, as all good Christians ought to have been at such an hour—but I heard you. And not foreign-post night either, nor West Indy mail, nor one of them City dinners, else you'd have been home to dress or took your bag with you to the office. Well, it's not for an old woman like me to say, but there's no doubt you're doing too much, slaving like no blackamoor that ever I read of, and all for what? All for— It's as good bacon as ever was cured, though you do push your plate away in that fashion. Try a bit, Master Robert—come now!"

"I can't, Alice. My mouth's out of taste. I've no appetite this morning; give me a cup of tea,—there's a dear soul,—and let me be quiet."

"Let you be quiet! You don't think I'd bother you, do you? Cup of tea, indeed. You'll want more than a cup of tea if you go on in this way, sitting up till all hours and fagging yourself over your business. I'm sure your 'ma and Miss Ellen will think you looking quite ill, when they come back from York; and it's all that dratted office as is doing it. I should like to see any body else who sticks to it as you do, and all for what—that's what I want to know? All for what? If you was a struggling on with nine children to educate and do for, you couldn't grind at it harder than you do; and you'll find it out sooner than you expect. Ah, Robert!" exclaimed the old woman, suddenly softening in her tone, and coming up close to him, "Robert, my own dear boy, don't be so headstrong, deary; don't work your life away in this fashion. There's no one knows you so well as I do, and I see you're

doing too much, and you're beginning to show it. Don't work so hard, my boy, my own dear boy!"

Robert Streightley put up his big arm and pulled down the old woman's head, and pressed her hard rough cheek, down which the tears were flowing silently, close to his own. Then, with an affectation of cheerfulness, he said :

"Why, Alice! why, nurse! you must not fancy such foolish things, old lady. I am perfectly well and hearty; only a little done-up this morning, perhaps, after an extra pressure of business yesterday, which kept me up rather later than usual, but otherwise all right."

"I'm a foolish old woman, I know, Robert; but I love you very dearly, and you're all I've left to love; and when you don't come home, I get frightened and nervous, and fancy you're doing too much, and that you ought to be here, in the dining-room, reading your newspaper or having your little nap, as usual, in the evenings, instead of working away at that horrible office to all hours. And you won't be home to-day again, I suppose?"

"O yes, indeed I shall! What made you think that?"

"Why, you've got on that blue frock-coat, and a white waistcoat, and your best cravat; just for all as you dress yourself when you go to them ship-launches, or Greenwich dinners of your companies, or other places which keep you away from where you're best—at your own home."

Streightley smiled, rather a ghastly smile, as he said: "O no! I'm only going to call on some rather particular people who—it's best to—at all events—I mean who are accustomed to something different from us—City fellows, you know!"

It was feebly said, and feebly received by old Alice, who looked very grim, and only remarked: "Ay, ay—ay, ay!"

He made but a very poor apology for a breakfast, and said not a great deal more to his old friend, who stood by, vainly hoping for that "chat" with her boy which was the prime event of her day. But this morning Robert Streightley was preoccupied; he sat over the table long

after he had finished eating, idly playing with the crumbs; and evidently buried in thought. At length he roused himself, and after referring several times nervously to his watch, he started for town.

It was his habit to go by omnibus; and from his long residence at Brixton he was known to all the coachmen on the road, each of whom on passing gave him a semi-respectful semi-inviting salutation. But Robert Streightley was not inclined for an omnibus-ride this morning; he felt somehow that such a mode of conveyance would not accord with the world a glimpse of which he had had on the previous day, nor with the errand on which he was proceeding; so he hailed the first disengaged hansom, and was driven rapidly to Queen Anne Street. So rapidly, that when he alighted from the cab at the corner of the street he found it yet wanted twelve minutes of eleven, the hour he had named for his interview with Mr. Guyon. He could not be before his time; that would be as much against the strict business rule in which he had been brought

up as being behind it would argue either leisure or a strong interest in the matter then on hand, and neither supposition he thought advisable in respect to him. So he determined to eke out the time; and for that purpose strolled up a side street, and found himself gazing vacantly on the dressing and exercising of horses and the washing of carriages, in a mews, at the entrance to which he stood for some little time. After walking round and round, and circling a very narrowed square, he found that the back part of Mr. Guyon's house looked into this mews; and then he busied himself with wondering which was Miss Guyon's room, and whether she were there at that time, and whether she had thought of him since the interview in the City, and what she had thought of him, and— And then looking at his watch, he found the eventful hour had arrived; so he walked boldly round, and, ringing the bell, demanded to see Mr. Guyon.

A colourless footman with light hair and weak eyes, in a very washed-out lilac-striped jacket

and dusty gray trousers, answered the bell, and showed Streightley into the dining-room. This was a cheerless apartment, painted salmon-colour, with a dozen Cromwell chairs in faded American cloth and spurious oak ranged round the room, but with some genuine ancestors, a Lely, a couple of Knellers, a Reynolds—such a conception of female childish purity and grace!—and a Lawrence, hanging on the walls. The Turkey carpet was faded and patched; the green table-cover was stained and torn; the window-blinds were yellow, and damp-stained; and every where there was a *laissez aller* which generally bespeaks the absence of female government. The mantelpiece was covered with purple velvet blurred with sticky rings made by overflowing glasses; in the centre of it lay an oxydised-silver cigar-ash holder in the form of an open spread leaf, in which still remained the ends of a couple of half-smoked cigars; and in the looking-glass, between the glass and the frame, were invitation-cards, photographs of boxers, and ladies of the Parisian theatres, all wearing the same scanty drapery and leering the self-same leer,—appli-

cations for payment of queen's taxes, and notices that the "collector had called" for the water-rate. Robert Streightley had gazed round him; and with the power of appreciation innate in him had remarked these various objects and indications when the door opened quickly, and Mr. Guyon entered the room.

Mr. Guyon, none but he; no mistaking him. In the bold face that flashed upon him Streightley recognised a coarser and stronger rendering of Miss Guyon's every feature: the delicately-cut slightly aquiline nose, the small rounded chin, the vivacious green-gray eye. Mr. Guyon's hair, which was rather sparse and thin, was of a different colour from his daughter's; was indeed in itself of two distinct hues, being very black and glossy in certain lights, and very purple and lustreless in others. His complexion, too, was peculiar,—mottled and speckled, something like a plover's egg, save just under the eyes, on the top of the cheekbones, where it had a very roseate hue. He was dressed in a loose blue-silk jacket with a red collar and red sleeve-linings, and wore

a pair of Turkish trousers, tied round the waist with a cord like a bell-rope. His turn-down collar was cut very low, showing a great deal of bony throat; his wristbands were long, fastened with elaborate carbuncle studs, and coming far down over his white, well-shaped hands. He wore striped-silk socks of the rather loud pattern,—which, seen at the theatre under the loose garb of the mandarin, enables us to make a tolerably accurate guess at the identity of the person in the pantomime who is to be “afterwards clown,”—and natty red-morocco slippers. He came into the room with a rush, had Robert Streightley by the hand in an instant, and forced him into a chair as he said,

“Mr. Streightley, this is kind indeed! This is an honour I can never forget!”

Streightley, rather taken aback at the warmth of his reception, said, “It is nothing, Mr. Guyon. I can assure you I merely called because—”

“I know, my dear sir, I know. My daughter explained to me what she did yesterday, and how generously you received her.” Robert’s eyes

brightened as he listened. "Women, you know, my dear sir, are all impulse. You are a married man, my dear Mr. Streightley? No! well, still, my dear sir, I daresay—ha, ha!—that you have thorough experience of the other sex. When a man is young, and pleasing, and rich—O yes, by George, rich! ha, ha!—he has opportunities of studying the other sex, even if he be not married. Not married? Let me see, what was I saying? O, my daughter—who is the prop and sunshine of my life, the dearest and most devoted creature in the world—my daughter has told me of the document which caused her such fright. It was—it was merely the—usual notice, I suppose?"

"It was the usual notice."

As Streightley said this, a loud peal at the door-bell attracted his attention.

"And the amount?"

"A hundred and eighty pounds odd—stay, I have the bill with me;" and drawing out his pocket-book, Robert produced the document. As he did this, he heard the street-door opened, and the sound of a man's footsteps passing the dining-

room and going upstairs. His heart sank within him. He would swear to that footfall—swear to it any where; had he not heard it twelve hours before echoing up the hollow staircase in Crown Office Row? It was that man; and he was going upstairs to see Miss Guyon, doubtless in fulfilment of some appointment made during the exchange of bows and glances at the carriage-door last night. He turned deadly pale, and his lips trembled.

“Will you allow me to look at that bill?” said Mr. Guyon in his most mellifluous tones. “Thank you. How your hand trembles!—a little chill perhaps. Draw closer to the fire. We seem to have begun the cold weather already. For my own part, I could always endure a fire—O, this is really very bad of Davidson; very bad indeed!” He had been surveying the document which Streightley had handed to him through a pair of gold double eyeglasses perched on the bridge of his nose; and he now looked over them at Streightley as he repeated, “Very bad indeed!”

"I—I beg your pardon—my attention was diverted. What did you say?"

"I said, Mr. Streightley," said Mr. Guyon with increased sternness, "that this is a very bad business of Davidson's. I gave him this acceptance, sir, to help him in—the what do you call it?—the hour of need, under the full understanding that he would meet it. It was for his convenience, not for mine. I never had a shilling of the produce; and now he leaves me to discharge it at a time when he knows that—"

"That it will be inconvenient to meet it?"

"You anticipate my words, sir. What with paying calls on shares, and investments in certain other affairs which I have authority—almost as good as yours, my dear sir—for believing in, my balance at my banker's is at its lowest permissible ebb."

"If it will be any accommodation to you, Mr. Guyon, I'll send my cheque to meet this acceptance; and I'll take another from you at three months," said Streightley nervously. If he were

ever to be received upstairs, it must be through the father's influence.

"My dear sir, a thousand thanks! I'm really very much obliged to you—very much obliged. I'm sure any terms which—"

"I think the Bank rate is three and a half just now," interrupted Streightley with a slight smile; "we money-brokers charge one per cent in advance of that. So that you see I make something of you after all."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Guyon, advancing towards him with outstretched hand, "you endeavour to make light of an obligation; but I'm too much of an old soldier not to know the service you have rendered me. And I thank you for it—I thank you for it! In these levelling days, when a gentleman meets a gentleman, they should close ranks and march together, by George! Give me your hand, sir. I'm proud to make your acquaintance. I hope to renew it. There are not many that Ned Guyon sees at his table, because, perhaps, he's infernally particular, and does not choose to mix with cads.

But those who come are of the right sort; and he'll be proud to see you among them."

"You're very good, I'm sure," said Streightley. "Perhaps you'll give me a call in the City in a day or two, and we'll put this matter on a business footing. And now I must be off. I shall be delighted to come whenever you ask me—and—my compliments to Miss Guyon. Good-day!" and with a warm shake of his new acquaintance's hand—a shake which was enthusiastically returned—Robert Streightley took his departure.

Left to himself, Mr. Guyon plunged his hands into the pockets of his Turkish trousers and strode several times up and down the room, finally stopping in front of the looking-glass and soliloquising: "A rum start,—a devilish rum start! I thought I'd seen every variety of discounters, but I never met one who behaved like that before. What the devil was his motive? he had one, of course; but what the devil was it?"

Meanwhile a very different scene was being

enacted in the drawing-room. Robert Streightley's presence had not deceived him. The ring at the bell, which acted with such electrical effect on Streightley's nerves, was given by the young man whom he had followed to his chambers on the previous evening; the footstep passing up the staircase was his footstep; and the colourless footman, throwing open the drawing-room door, announced him as "Mr. Gordon Frere." Miss Guyon looked up from the flowers she was tending, and her cheek slightly flushed. The flush was very becoming to Miss Guyon—at least Mr. Frere approved of it highly, as he did of her high-cut mouse-coloured plush dress, her neat linen collar fastened with a handsome dead-gold brooch, her long cuffs, and her simply-arranged hair.

"You are early, Mr. Frere," said Miss Guyon, as she extended her hand to her visitor; but she made the remark in a tone which marked her approval of the circumstance.

"Yes," he replied; "I feared you might have gone to the Park, if I came later."

"I don't ride to-day," said Katharine with a bright smile; "papa is busy, and I did not make any other arrangements."

She moved away from the table over which she had been bending as she spoke, and seated herself in a low chair, happily placed in the shade of the window-curtain. Gordon Frere took his seat upon an ottoman near her, and contemplated the lining of his hat with close attention. Not that he was at all awkward—awkwardness was not in Mr. Frere's nature, certainly not in his habits—but he was not a particularly ready talker, and under the circumstances this seemed the correct thing to do. Katharine Guyon's manners were, in certain respects, perfect; they were, indeed, rather too perfect and independent; she presented too complete a contrast to the drooping-lily style of girl; and she never suffered from a sense of embarrassment. It was not, therefore, shyness which lent her downy cheek that beautiful flush it had worn at the entrance of her visitor, and continued to wear, or that softened glance which darkened the colour and

deepened the expression of her eyes. She was very glad to see him, and she showed her gladness; and there was a pleasant gleeful ring in the tone in which she talked to him of the various but trivial events of the preceding day, of their common acquaintances, and of the delights of last night's opera.

Her voice and accent were remarkably refined, and the tone of her conversation, though its matter was only of the ordinary kind, was far removed from the commonplace. She touched her topics lightly and easily, let them go without too much handling, and gradually infused into her companion some of the brightness and buoyancy which animated herself. Gordon Frere had seen her sufficiently often to be familiar with most of her moods, and with all the variations of her appearance; for hers was by no means the "beauty for ever unchangingly bright," which is also undeniably uninteresting; but he began to think that he had never seen her to so much advantage as on this occasion, and to discover new charms in her, as she sat and talked

to him, in her clear fresh voice, and her low happy laughter broke every now and then the tenor of their dialogue.

What did they talk about? That would be difficult to tell; and the discourse, written down, which suffices to charm and engross two young persons, already very well disposed to regard each other as the most bewitching and delightful individuals in the world, would have singularly little attraction for a third party outside that enchanted pale, which encloses within a magic circle the sayings and doings of those under the spell. The pleasantest "talks" are those which have the least in them; the best-remembered interviews are frequently those in which there have been no salient features, of which it would be hardest to render an account,—those in which acquaintance passes into knowledge, and grows into friendship after a strange fashion, distinctly felt, but not to be described. When the transition is not from acquaintance to friendship, but from liking to love, the process is even more difficult of description; and a transition of this

kind was taking place in the pretty, if not particularly neat, drawing-room which formed so striking a contrast to the apartment beneath it, in which Mr. Guyon and Robert Streightley had held a parley, destined to influence the future fate of Katharine and her visitor very materially.

What did they not talk of? that is to say, within the wide range of topics possessing interest for their young light hearts. The festivities performed during the past week, and anticipated for that to come; the prospects of a charitable bazaar, at which Miss Guyon had kindly consented to take a stall (Mr. Frere was very happy in his anticipation of the unqualified success of the speculation); the Opera *répertoires* for the season; the last new varieties of flowers at the Botanical (Miss Guyon loved flowers and understood them); the last new novel, and the forthcoming poem by the Laureate. Then they discussed Tennyson in general, and Katharine quoted him in particular—an achievement in which Gordon Frere could not imitate her, his appreciation being vague, though genuine; and

Katharine "tried over" one or two of the airs which they agreed to prefer among those in fashion just then; and time flew, and the young people felt decidedly happy.

Miss Guyon played brilliantly; her music had a great deal of the "dash" about it which characterised her appearance and her general demeanour. She was one of those women who do every thing well which they undertake at all, and the finish of her manner extended to all she did. She had another peculiarity; perhaps not a safe or advantageous one in the end, but pleasant and effective then. She could do certain things with impunity which girls in her position, however effectually "come out," could not have attempted. She set conventionality aside when it suited her to do so; but the boldest and most ill-natured critic would never have accused her of outraging it. The men who tempt women into departure from the rules, made and appointed for their conduct and customs by a society more remarkable for suspicion than for intelligence, are precisely those who most severely

condemn them for yielding to the temptation. But there was neither guidance nor following in Miss Guyon's case. She was an exceptional woman, placed in circumstances which are, fortunately, not very common; and she went her own way, and kept, to it unmolested; and if not uncriticised, criticised as little as any one possessing youth, beauty, talent, and individuality of character, could expect to be.

So Miss Guyon talked to Gordon Frere, and played for his delectation, and quoted poetry to him, and made herself most agreeable; and his stay prolonged itself much beyond the customary limits of a morning visit; and yet she never felt that this was any thing unusual, or was conscious that her self-possession was beyond that of other girls, or her manner more assured than theirs. She never thought about it at all; she enjoyed the present time and the young man's society; she accredited him with all sorts of social talents and bright congenial tastes; and no suspicion ever occurred to her that he was merely reflecting some of her own readiness, brilliancy, and versatility.

And Gordon Frere, was not "he too in Arcadia"? Over the girl's whole bearing an indescribable softness, a winning grace was thrown,—the subtle, all-powerful charm created by the desire of pleasing; perhaps the most potent, and frequently the most unconscious, in a woman's possession. She looked her best, she talked her best, the animation of her manner never passing the bounds of perfect refinement, but ever spontaneous and unsubdued; the simple grace of her figure, the sensitive beauty of her face must have touched and warmed a duller man than Gordon Frere. There was a delicious flattery in her undisguised pleasure in his society which he felt with a subtler sense than he had ever before experienced; for there was no one to share it here. She was shining, she was sparkling for him alone. This was something different, something much more delightful than the ride in the Row, or the dance in the ball-room, to which he was tolerably well accustomed, and which he might have gone on enjoying for some time longer without being inspired by the intense admiration which

began to possess him as he looked at her, and listened to her, as he recognised the genuine charm of her manner, unspoiled by the faintest tinge of self-consciousness or coquetry.

“Do you know much of the City?” Katharine said, after a slight pause in their conversation; “do you often go there?”

“No, indeed,” said Frere; “I seldom have occasion; and my rambles eastwards rarely extend beyond the Temple. But why do you ask? Do you take an interest in the City?”

“I do,” she returned thoughtfully; “I should like to explore it thoroughly for the sake of its present and its past. I have never seen any thing of it since I was a child, and they took me to the Tower, and Guildhall, and the Thames Tunnel all on the same day; and I remember nothing but a hideous figure of Queen Elizabeth, the block—which frightened me—Gog and Magog, and my own fatigue. I was horribly tired when I came home; and when, on another holiday, they wanted to take me to St. Paul’s, and told me about the

winding stairs and the whispering gallery, I positively declined the proposed diversion. So I have never really seen the City. I drove through a part of it yesterday, and a very dingy part it was too; and I thought how much I should like to see it all and think over it all."

"I don't suppose many people think of it in that way," said Mr. Frere; "to the world at large it's only a huge counting-house, a busy beehive, a crowd of places where money is to be made, and of men intent on making it."

"But even in that aspect it is very interesting," said Katharine; "and in that aspect I was considering it when I looked at the great warehouses and offices, and saw the names whose very sound is golden, the names famous all over the world. But, after all, these people must lead horribly stupid lives, for ever toiling at money-getting. I don't suppose they have time to enjoy spending it when it is made. Only fancy how dreadful to have to go to these dingy places every day, and stay there all day long."

"That is true," said Gordon Frere. "The lives of City men do not seem very enviable, or indeed bearable to us; but there must be a compensation in them. Some of them must absolutely *like* plodding, for they go on with it long after they need not, as a matter of choice."

"Do they?" asked Katharine in a tone of surprise. "I saw a 'City man' when I was there,—I had a little business to attend to for papa, as he was not at home,—and he had such a settled, business-like look, though he was not at all old. I could not fancy him ever taking any pleasure or amusement, or being like other people—of course, I mean," she added explanatorily, "any of the pleasures of his class."

"O, I suppose not," said Frere; "a regular grub, who will be what he will be content to call rich when he's gray and gouty. But they have one consolation, Miss Guyon: as their business and their pleasure alike consist in money-getting, the one is not purchased at the expense of the other."

“Like ours,” she said with a laugh, “when we have any business.” Then she went on again, thoughtfully as before: “I should like to go all through the City. Not for the sake of seeing the places where all the money that I have nothing to do with is made; but because so much of our old history was acted out there. I suppose in the City one can get a sight of the old landmarks; and they are certainly not to be found outside it. It is rather odd that every thing that is most dignified connects itself in one’s mind with City places, and every thing that is most vulgar with City people. If one could only see it after all the money-grubbers are gone away, and when it is still and quiet in the evenings, as they say it is—”

“And when, accordingly, the most ingenious and charmingly-sensational robberies are perpetrated,” said Gordon Frere, laughing. “Well, that is a wish easily gratified. Who was the man who always said, when any place was mentioned, ‘Let’s make a party and go’? No matter, we will

echo him. I know a man who knows lots of City men, who would be delighted to show you every thing worth seeing; and then there are books, you know, which tell one the history—I was going to say the pedigree—of every place. But I suppose Mr. Guyon has City acquaintances also?”

Gordon Frere asked the question inadvertently, and felt rather guilty when he had done so; for he had heard certain rumours which left him in no doubt at all as to the nature of Mr. Guyon’s acquaintance with the far east.

“I daresay he has,” replied Katharine carelessly; “but I don’t know any thing of them. My business was only with a tradesman, a person named Streightley, and I have never heard papa mention his business friends.”

And then the conversation drifted to other topics, and Gordon Frere shortly after took his leave. This morning visit had been unlike the ordinary events of his days, and he felt towards Katharine Guyon as he left her as he had never

felt before. And Katharine? She had reseated herself at the piano as he left the room, and her fingers had strayed for a few moments over the keys; then her hands fell idly into her lap, and, in the sunshine of the summer day, unbroken by the stir and noise in the street, there came upon the fair young girl that wonderful waking trance whose vision is "love's young dream."

The trance was broken by the entrance of her father. Mr. Guyon's manner, always light and airy, was on this occasion lighter and airier than usual. He walked up to the piano, bent over his daughter, and giving her a paternal kiss, said, "Who was your visitor, Kate?"

Not without a repetition of the blush, Katharine said, "Mr. Frere, papa."

"Mr. Frere!" repeated Mr. Guyon,—“ay, ay, a good fellow, Gordon Frere,—a good fellow! Wants ballast perhaps!” added he reflectively, as though he himself were provided with more than an average amount of that commodity,—

"wants ballast; but that will come. By the way, Kate, I've had your City friend of yesterday with me,—Mr. Streightley."

"Indeed, papa!" said Katharine carelessly. It was a great descent from Gordon Frere to the City man, Mr. Streightley. She rose from the piano as she spoke, and crossed to the mantel-shelf, on which she leaned her arm.

"Indeed, papa! Yes, and indeed, papa, and no mistake. It's a most remarkable thing, and I can't make it out. You don't understand business matters in detail, but you'll be able to follow me when I tell you that this Streightley, who has the name of being a deuced sharp man of business, has behaved to me in a deuced liberal and gentlemanly way—a deuced liberal and gentlemanly way! And what on earth can have been his motive—for of course he had a motive—what on earth can have induced him to show me any special favour, I can't divine."

"Can't you, papa?" said Miss Guyon. She was looking at herself in the glass, pushing back the hair from off her temples. A slight smile

curved her lip, and she looked splendidly handsome. Mr. Guyon, glancing at her, caught the expression reflected in the glass and sprang to his feet.

"By George, Kate, I've hit it! the man's in love with you!"

"Is he?" said Katharine simply. "I noticed him in the Park yesterday afternoon, and standing outside the Opera last night."

"You're an angel!" said Mr. Guyon, again performing the paternal salute. "What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"I thought of going to the Botanical Gardens in the afternoon—it's the last *fête* of the season."

"You shall go! I'll take you myself! You—you have not asked young Frere to call again, have you?"

"No, papa. I—"

"Of course. I only wanted to know. Don't, until I tell you. And now I must be off. God bless you, my child!"

But though Mr. Guyon took farewell of his

daughter he was not "off" yet; for he spent half an hour in his dressing-room, his head resting on his hand, and his busy mind full of thought.



CHAPTER III.

WITHIN THE PALE.

THREE days had elapsed since the interview between Katharine Guyon and Gordon Frere, which had gone so far towards deciding the destiny of both, when that haughty young lady learned, with some astonishment and more disdain, that her father had it in contemplation to invite Mr. Streightley, the "tradesman" on whom she had called "in the City," to one of his quiet and limited, but very *recherché* dinners. She heard the announcement with such surprise that her father actually took the trouble of observing the expression of her face, and laughed quite spontaneously at it.

"That person, papa?" asked Katharine.

"Yes, my dear, 'that person,' as you call him, with the pretty insolence which is more be-

coming than reasonable. And more than that, Kate, you must make yourself agreeable to that person, and we must have pleasant people to meet him, for he has done me a great service, and is likely to do me several good turns, and to be a very useful acquaintance."

"But, papa," pursued Katharine, who was accustomed to hold her ground in words, as well as to have her way in actions, "he is not in our set, or in any set, I should think. A City person, a tradesman! I really cannot see—"

"I daresay not, Kate," said her father, with a perceptible knitting of the delicately-traced eyebrows over the fine eyes, which indicated that this exquisite gentleman was not precisely the soul of patience and good temper. "I daresay not, but *I* can; and that is the chief matter just now. I daresay Mr. Streightley is not in any 'set,' as you say; but when you talk of him as a 'tradesman' you make a very silly and an ignorant mistake. Yes you do," he continued, in reply to an indignant look from his daughter, "though you are very clever, Katie,—almost as clever as

you are handsome, my dear. Mr. Streightley is a very rich and a very influential man, and no more a tradesman than I am."

"Well then, papa," asked Katharine, "what did he mean by sending in a bill in that extraordinary way? If he is not a tradesman, what dealings with him had you, and what services has he done you?"

Mr. Guyon smiled. His daughter's *naïveté* amused him. "Never mind, Kate," he said. "Men have money transactions outside their household bills, my dear, or even their tailors and bootmakers; but women do not need to understand these things, and I should only bore you if I explained them. Mr. Streightley's 'bill' was a very different thing to what you imagine, and his position is, I assure you, a most respectable one. Take my word for that, Kate, and don't trouble your pretty little head about the matter. I hope we shall see a good deal of Mr. Streightley, and I wish this dinner-party to be a success; so make out your list, and see Watkins about it at once."

“Do you wish any people in particular to be asked to meet this new friend, papa?” asked Katharine, in a tone which was a little sullen, and just the least in the world impertinent, “or shall I take them, as usual, from the visiting-book?”

Mr. Guyon ignored the tone of his daughter’s question, but replied to its matter by saying: “No, no one in particular; either Lady Henmarsh or Mrs. Stanbourne, of course; but you need not have any girls. I fancy Streightley knows very few people; they’ll all be new to him.”

“Bar, Bench, or Bishop, like Mrs. Merdle,—eh, papa?” said Katharine, as she rose from the breakfast-table, at which this dialogue had taken place. “Very well, I’ll let you see my list when it’s done. And now, the day?”

This point was fixed, after a little discussion; and then Katharine went to talk with her house-keeper, Mrs. Watkins, to write her notes, to dawdle over her flowers, until the horses came round; and she started for the Park with the reasonable expectation of seeing Gordon Frere—

an expectation which was fulfilled before she had been five minutes in the Row.

During the days which intervened before that named for the dinner-party, Katharine never gave a passing thought to the subject of her father's strange and incongruous guest; but when the day came, she felt rather ill-humoured about the whole thing.

"What on earth can papa want with him?" she thought, impatiently; "and I am to make myself agreeable to him! Well, that generally comes easy to me; but not in this case. I can't even talk to him about the City, which I really should like, because that would be talking shop, though he's not a tradesman. However, it will soon be over," she thought, brightening up, and with an exquisite smile of happy anticipation lighting up her face, moody till then; "and the ball can't fail to be delightful."

Miss Guyon was going to a ball in the evening, after her dinner-party at home; and her toilet was made with a view to that festivity.

An ornament or two, and a magical touch added to her head-dress, were all she would require for the perfect brilliancy of her appearance, in addition to the white dress, arrayed in which she appeared to the enchanted gaze of Robert Streightley, when he was ushered into her drawing-room, like a vision from another world. And it was quite true that he had never seen so beautiful, so graceful, so elegant a woman as the girl-hostess, who played her part with perfect self-possession, while he felt miserably embarrassed in his.

Katharine was seated on an ottoman, placed between the long narrow windows of the front drawing-room, talking to an elderly lady, whom Robert Streightley's quick eye recognised, as he advanced from the door. Mr. Guyon left the group with whom he was talking, on the announcement of Robert's name; and went forward to meet him with a decided *empressement* of manner which had its effect on the other guests assembled. He led Robert up to Katharine, and presented him to her. She

bent her graceful head, said a gracious word or two, and resumed her conversation with the lady—whom Robert had recognised, and who was Lady Henmarsh—with well-bred imperturbability. Did she remember him? Robert thought. Had she ever thought of him since that day which had meant to him so much, but to her so little? So little! nothing! and yet not nothing, if she had only known it, for he had discovered things about her father since. Robert found himself thinking these rambling thoughts, and gazing helplessly at Katharine, unheeding the smooth flow of Mr. Guyon's talk, as that gentleman, in his very best and airiest manner, addressed himself to the entertainment of his new and useful guest, and to the task of putting him at his ease in this strange sphere. With a sudden consciousness of his absence of mind came self-command to Robert, and before long he began to examine the other guests with much more of attention and curiosity than they were at all likely to bestow on him. To the dozen persons

assembled in Mr. Guyon's drawing-room Robert Streightley was merely a stranger,—well-dressed, well-looking, and though deficient in the air of fashion, which more or less marked themselves, a gentleman in whom there was nothing to provoke any adverse or sneering criticism. To Robert they were all interesting. These were Katharine's friends,—the people she lived amongst, the people who could influence her by their tastes and opinions, the people whose manners, and dress, and conversation she liked. In every man in the room Robert saw a possible rival, in every woman a possible enemy. He was very foolish, not only in the ordinary sense in which every man who is in love is foolish, but in an extraordinary sense,—the result of his peculiar position, and the isolation of his life. He was possessed by his one idea; and he allowed it to become a centre round which every thing revolved. When the announcement of dinner told him that the party was complete, and relieved him from the apprehension of seeing

Gordon Frere's handsome face amongst the number, he actually sighed audibly with the sense of relief. He listened eagerly, as Mr. Guyon or Katharine addressed their guests, and learned with absurd satisfaction that three of the six gentlemen who composed the male portion of the company were married to three of the six ladies who composed the female portion.

Robert Streightley was a very clever man, but there was a dangerously weak side to his intellect, all the more perilous that he had never suspected it, and did not suspect it now; and that weak side was about to be stormed by a strong passion, all the more ungovernable because it attacked him for the first time. He had never played with this dangerous enemy; he had not known any of the feints, the mock-surprises of love, and he was hopelessly at its mercy. Mingled happiness and misery,—the happiness of this delicious, unexpected access to Katharine's presence, the misery of his uncertainty as to her relations with others, with one terrible other in particular—

the sense of his strangeness in the scene familiar to her,—ravaged and divided his heart between them. For a time the misery was predominant; and then Robert, an impressionable man, and one in whom social tastes were not non-existent, only dormant, yielded to the charm of the present, and gave himself up to admiration of Katharine, who never showed to greater advantage than on such occasions. The *aplomb* of her manner, the brilliancy of her conversation, the taste, elegance, and fashion of her dress, the easy and pleasant grace with which she made the dinner-party “go off” with a success utterly beyond his experience of any festal occasion whatever, were full of a marvellous charm for the man who looked at this girl through the glorified medium of a first and overmastering passion.

Robert took little heed of the other guests, except as one or other of them engaged Katharine’s attention, and so divided his. He had the good fortune to be seated near Miss Guyon; and but that Lady Henmarsh directed much of her conversation to the young hostess, and so won

Streightley's enthusiastic gratitude, she would probably have found her neighbour rather a dull companion. But Lady Henmarsh was never dull, and never suffered from other people's dulness. In the first place, she dearly liked and thoroughly understood a good dinner; and Mr. Guyon's dinners were invariably and remarkably good. She made it a practice to eat systematically and steadily through all the courses, and to do justice to all the wines. She was too fashionable and too impervious to other people's opinions to care what any body thought; and so she ate and drank precisely as much as she pleased, and gave her opinion of the comestibles with perfect candour. She was intimate with every one there, except that good-looking new man, who was probably clever in something, but whom nobody knew, and who did not seem to want to talk much or to be talked to; and she therefore joined in all the general conversation, and did not mind him particularly, thereby increasing Robert's gratitude. Lady Henmarsh talked remarkably well. She was naturally quick and intelligent—well-informed too, for a

woman of fashion, with, of course, no time for improving her mind; and as she knew every one and had been every where, and probably had a more extensive epistolary correspondence than any other woman in London who did not play at either literature or politics, she was never at a loss for news to communicate or subjects to discuss.

With the exception of Mr. Guyon, whose like was not quite unknown within the circle of Robert's experience, every type there was a novel one to him. Few were interesting after a little,—after a cursory examination extending to their personal appearance and the grooves in which their conversation ran. There was a new member, who talked "House" a good deal, and his wife—pretty and well-dressed—who talked "Ladies' Gallery," who hoped her husband would soon "speak" on the great topic of the day, and who seemed to regard every one not "in the House" as in the "butterfly of fashion" and general inutility line. There was a country gentleman, not at all stupid and not in the least fat;

and a country lady, almost as sprightly as Miss Guyon herself, though by no means so handsome. The country lady and gentleman were also going to Mrs. Pendarvis's ball; and from their talk about it at dinner Robert learned that Katharine was going to another entertainment that evening, and the tortures of his infatuated state recommenced. She would disappear, then, after dinner, and he should see no more of her, thought Robert in his innocent ignorance of fashionable hours; and she would go and glitter among a crowd of happy people, and that handsome fellow with the light hair would be one of them. And so Robert once more stretched himself upon the rack, and gave himself an excruciating twist. He was miserable from the time the ball was mentioned. Did he wish that he could go there too? Hardly; he felt he would be too much out of place in such a scene; and where could he be more hopelessly parted from her? No, he did not wish to be going to Mrs. Pendarvis's house; he only wished she were not going.

"Have you a card, Mr. Mostyn?" he heard Katharine say in a charming accent of interest to a gentleman seated near her, whom Robert had already regarded with some surprise and amusement.

"Yes," returned Mr. Mostyn in a supremely languid tone, at the same time permitting his eyes to raise themselves towards Katharine, as if in slow acknowledgment of the complimentary accent. "I think I shall look in for an hour very late. Will you give me a dance, Miss Guyon?" He said this as if he felt bound to make a concession to a wish of hers. Robert Streightley had very quick eyes, and he saw her steal a glance of sly, mischievous amusement at Lady Henmarsh as she replied,

"I don't see how I can, Mr. Mostyn, if you only look in for an hour very late, for I mean to do my looking in rather early."

"Very sorry, I'm sure," said Mr. Mostyn in a slow, measured, would-be modulated tone, which sounded to Robert's ears like the very voice of fatuity. "But one has so much to do

of an evening just now. It's Lady Ismaeli's night, and I promised to look in and—"

"Of course, of course," said Miss Guyon, and her eyes danced with mischievous glee; "who would for the world interfere with Mr. Mostyn's gaieties? We all know they are but gravities in disguise. He is the slave of the season only to be its satirist, the pet of society to requite its indulgence by his teachings as a philosopher and his dulcet lays as a poet. Who would lay a tax on time spent in the service of society like Mr. Mostyn's, studying character in a cotillon, piercing the thin disguises of intrigue at a picnic, and reading the female soul in the evening lounge on a balcony? Ah, Mr. Mostyn, what triflers are we all beside you, the *poète-philosophe*, not only *sous les toits*, but of our dinner- and toilet-tables!"

Lady Henmarsh was listening, pleasure in her face. There was something under this lively talk, this seeming compliment; and Robert would have liked well to know what it was. It was something that amused Katharine, therefore interesting to him.

"Come, Mr. Mostyn," she went on, "you might tell *me*—I am a friend, you know. When is the new novel coming out? And what and who is it to be about? Only intimate friends this time, or have outsiders any chance?"

She paused for a reply, and an expression of candid curiosity was all her face betrayed. Mr. Mostyn did not look perfectly comfortable; a dawning doubt showed itself in his smooth features. It was only momentary, though. It cleared away, and he replied,

"Really, Miss Guyon, you embarrass me. I was not prepared to find you so much interested in my humble performances. I shall not publish again for some little time. I regard the writing of a poem or a novel as a serious undertaking, and I undertake it in a serious spirit. I wait for the inspiration, Miss Guyon; I wait until a favourable moment when my mind is attuned—"

"And when you have got some very good models, Mr. Mostyn; isn't that so? Your acquaintance is so large, it must be quite delightful and not at all difficult. Don't be shocked, please,

by my talking of such a little thing as difficulty in the case of such a grand thing as inspiration; but it must be so easy and pleasant just to sit down and put your friends in a book. People hardly expect it, do they? They let you see them as they are, and then that is charming; for you find out all about them, and they never suspect it; and all their circle recognise the portrait, and every one talks about it. I have quite a woman's curiosity about writers, you must know, Mr. Mostyn,—I quite admire and envy them,—and I should like to know all about them; and I have heard that even a totally worthless book will be read if it is very personal indeed. What a comfort that must be, Mr. Mostyn!—of course I mean to the persons who write worthless books; shouldn't you think so?"

Katharine threw a perfect tone of interrogation into her voice, and deliberately awaited an answer. Once more a shadow of doubt came over Mr. Mostyn's face, and once more a beam from the never-setting sun of his vanity dispelled it.

"I cannot imagine there being any consola-

tion in or for writing a worthless book, Miss Guyon," replied Mr. Mostyn with even increased sententiousness. "For my part, I could only be satisfied with doing the very best—"

"*The* very best, or *your* very best?" said Katharine with undisguised sauciness. Then recollecting herself, she dropped her voice to the serious tone again, and went on: "Of course no one is easily satisfied with his own work; but you really must not be too modest, Mr. Mostyn,—you mustn't indeed. Every one says your portraits are wonderful; and what can be more interesting than to depict accurately persons who are very widely known, and place them in the most trying situations? The popular authoress, for instance, who makes love to your last hero—dear, what an exquisite creature he is!—how odd she must feel it to be 'put in a book' and recognised by every body! Ah! you are a dangerous man, Mr. Mostyn; perhaps you'll put me in a book some day, if I am good enough, or bad enough, or ask you here sufficiently often to do all my sittings properly—but—Lady Henmarsh

looks as if I ought to have moved before this;" and so saying Katharine rose, and, like "fair Inez," took all the sunshine and light of every description with her, so far as Robert Streightley was concerned. Whether Mr. Mostyn was quite so sorry for her departure was another question. Robert looked at this gentleman with some curiosity and a little dawning compassion, for it struck him that Katharine had not spoken altogether *de bonne foi*, and he was curious to ascertain whether he too was aware of the fact.

Robert had little experience of *persiflage*, and was not behind the scenes on this occasion; but two or three of the other guests were, and they enjoyed the quiet little performance which had just been enacted greatly. As for Mr. Mostyn, his momentary discomfiture passed off with the characteristic reflection, that jealousy made all women spiteful, and Miss Guyon had really not had so much of his attention lately as she deserved,—he must be more considerate of her feelings for the future. The ladies gone, the gentlemen drew up into the usual cluster, and com-

menced the ordinary after-dinner conversation; and Robert would probably have found the affair very wearisome on its own account, not to mention that he was longing to be in Katharine's presence again, had not Mr. Guyon exerted himself to the utmost to draw him out, and to give the conversation a general turn, so as to include him, and to make it evident to the whole party that the "new man" was one whom he delighted to honour.

When the ladies were passing through the hall, Lady Henmarsh had said laughingly to Katharine, "For shame, Kate; you were too hard on the young author."

"Nonsense!" replied Katharine. "You enjoyed it immensely, and he deserved it richly."

When the gentlemen came into the drawing-room at Mr. Guyon's that night, Katharine was seated at the piano. Had any portion of Robert Streightley's heart remained unvanquished, she would have conquered it by her music; but he was already as much in love as he could be. Soon the business of leave-taking commenced.

Robert was reluctantly advancing to make his adieux, when Mr. Guyon took him familiarly by the arm and said,

“Don’t go just yet, Streightley. We’ll see the ladies to the carriage, and then have a chat and a cigar in my room.”

Miss Guyon left the room with Lady Henmarsh, but returned in a few minutes, wrapped in a soft white mantle. Every alteration in her appearance made her more beautiful in Robert’s eyes. He had the felicity of taking her downstairs; and as she bowed and smiled from the corner of the carriage in which she had ensconced herself, and was then borne rapidly away, Robert needed Mr. Guyon’s “Come along, Streightley; don’t stand there in the cold,” to rouse him from a sort of trance of admiration.

The ball at Mrs. Pendarvis’s was crowded and brilliant, and Katharine’s hopes were realised. Gordon Frere had waited her arrival on the staircase, and claimed her for the first dance. The hours passed like a dream to them both; and when Mr. Alured Mostyn “looked in,” and at

length succeeded in finding Miss Guyon, he saw her so radiant with beauty, so sparkling with animation, that he was quite touched at the idea of the effect produced by her pleasure in seeing him.

Another person noticed the unusual beauty and the increased animation of Katharine Guyon that night, and formed a truer estimate of its origin. This was Lady Henmarsh. She made certain observations, drew certain conclusions, and determined on a line of conduct which will develop itself in the course of events.

And Robert? Well, Robert had his chat and his cigar with Mr. Guyon, and then he went home—home to the house which he had never before thought vulgar or insignificant, which he had never thought about at all indeed, and which was in truth much more solidly comfortable than the gaudier abode which had suddenly been converted into a shrine to his fancy. He shrunk from it now as he thought, “I wonder what she would say to this, and our mode of life here?” and he returned the old nurse’s greet-

ing with grudging ill-humour, being inclined to resent her sitting up for him, though it was not an abnormally late hour, and her opening the door for him, which, though not her business, was, as he well knew, her pleasure.

"Any news, nurse? any letters?" he asked, in a tone wholly devoid of interest in the reply.

"No, Master Robert," said the old woman; "there's no letters, and there's nobody been but Miss Hester Gould, a-wantin' to know when Miss Ellen's comin' home."

CHAPTER IV.

MR. GUYON'S FRIEND.

THE astonishment of Mr. Guyon at the liberal treatment which he had received at the hands of his new creditor was by no means feigned. That worthy gentleman, in the course of a long career of impecuniosity, had become acquainted with all the various plans of all the leading discounters of the city of London; knew what he called their "whole bag of tricks;" understood the different ways of getting time or obtaining renewal, according to the various idiosyncrasies of the holders of his stamped paper; and gave to the subject an amount of talent, industry, and attention which, otherwise employed, might have brought him in a very fair income. A very fair income was not a thing to be despised by a gentleman in Mr. Guyon's position, whose actually

reliable income was represented by one figure, and that a round one. A sum of five thousand pounds indeed stood in the Consols in Edward Guyon's name; but on that pleasantly-sounding amount was laid a *distringas*, a horrible legal instrument preventing its withdrawal by the said Edward Guyon, while the annual interest, which would at least have kept him in cigars and gloves, found its way into the clutches of Messrs. Sharkey and Maw, attorneys-at-law, who had a few years previously advanced a sufficient sum to free Mr. Guyon from an unpleasant incarceration in the Queen's Bench, leaving him a few pounds over to convey himself to the Newmarket Spring Meeting, whither he proceeded immediately on his release. All that pleasant estate known as Bedingfield, in the county of Cheshire, with its three thousand acres of arable land, its salt- and coal-mines, its since-made railway bit, its punctually-paying tenant, and its various sources of revenue; which belonged to the Honourable Piers Rankley, and which every one thought he would bequeath to his cousin, Edward Guyon, had been

left to a distant relative of Piers Rankley's childless dead wife, one Jacob Long, a member of the Plymouth Brethren, and originally a hide-dresser in Bermondsey, who under the influence of qualms of conscience agreed to allow his reprobate connection Edward Guyon a sum of a thousand a-year, "at his pleasure." It had been a matter of acute annoyance to Ned Guyon that he had no legal claim or hold on this allowance; so that it was impossible for him to mortgage or anticipate it in any way, save by a three months' acceptance for the amount of the quarterly instalment—less commission and discount—payable on the day that instalment was due; but in reality it enabled him to pay renewal fees, to have occasional ready-money for certain *menus plaisirs* of his own and little treats for Kate, and to give such an air of respectability as it possessed to that old house in Queen Anne Street, the lease of which, with its dingy furniture and ten pounds for a mourning ring, had been his sole legacy from Piers Rankley.

But no income, however fair, would have

tempted Mr. Guyon to undertake any honest work, or, as he phrased it, any "d—d low ungentlemanlike slavery;" and the consequence was that, what with an accumulation of gambling-table (he was a member of the Nob and Heels Club, where they play whist for twenty-four hours at a sitting, pound points and a tanner on the rub) and turf debts, he was just at the time of his introduction into this story in a really desperate condition. It had been an unlucky season with him. His racing information had been bad throughout. Commencing ill last Chester, he had been hard hit at Epsom, had dropped more money at Ascot, and could only pull off a stake at the coming Doncaster by a most unlikely fluke. He had had frightful ill-luck at cards. Acknowledged to be one of the best whist-players of the day, he had scarcely held a trump since the winter, and had been beaten by the merest tyros. That very acceptance, which his new acquaintance Streightley held, had been given to Davidson for a card debt; and Guyon had forgotten all about it, having, contrary to his usual custom, omitted to enter it

in his book. However, that was staved off for the present; and the few words which he had had with his daughter on the subject had opened a new well-spring of life in Mr. Guyon's breast. If what Kate surmised, or rather half hinted at, were true—and, with all her pride and wilfulness, she had wonderful common-sense and shrewdness—it might, with judicious management, be turned to wondrous advantage. It was but in embryo yet, to be sure; but, with Kate's beauty and his own tact, it could be brought off at any moment, and the value of it would be—well, he would see at once what the value of it would be by representing it as a certainty to his chief creditor and principal discount-agent, Mr. Daniel Thacker.

Who was Mr. Daniel Thacker? If you had been heir to an entailed estate, with as large a taste for pleasure and as limited resources as such heirs usually possess; if you had been an officer in either of the Guards regiments, or any of the crack *corps*; if you had been a member of any of the West-end government offices, with fast tendencies; or an author; or an actor frequenting

fast society ; or a theatrical manager ; or a pretty *coryphée* fond of suppers and admiration,—you would not have had to ask the question ; for without doubt you would have possessed Mr. Thacker's acquaintance. A man combining the sharpest practice (in a gentlemanly way) as a bill-discounter with the keenest pursuit of pleasure of a strong, full-flavoured, not to say of a gross kind, was Mr. Thacker. A man who made cent per cent of his money by judicious investment, and who at the same time “parted” freely ; living in capital chambers in St. James's Street, keeping horses and carriages, entertaining frequently and well, having an Opera-stall for himself and frequently an Opera-box for a female friend, visiting the theatres, riding to hounds, and carrying out every thing he attempted in very excellent style. Life seemed a broad and pleasantly-turfed path for Mr. Daniel Thacker, down which he could stroll in his easy polished boots without the smallest stumbling-block to cause him annoyance. But there was one thing which wrung and chafed him, which he could never shut out from his hap-

piest hour, which proclaimed itself whenever he looked in the glass (which was not seldom), which lay like a hideous pitfall for Mr. Thacker's friends, into which they were perpetually tumbling and coming out covered with inarticulate excuses, which pointed the sarcasm of little boys in the streets at first overwhelmed by his splendour, and edged the repartee of insolent cabmen, to whom he called to clear the way for his high-stepping steeds,—a fact which nothing could hide, a brand which no money could obliterate ;—Mr. Daniel Thacker was an unmistakable Jew. Unmistakable ! as unmistakable as if he had retained his old family name of Hart ; as if he had remained in his old family neighbourhood of St. Mary Axe ; as if he had continued his old family occupation of contracting with the government for the supply of rum and lemons for the navy, and uniforms for the postmen. In that choice neighbourhood, and out of those apparently not very meaty contracts, had old Simeon Hart, Daniel's uncle, made all the wealth which he bequeathed to his nephew ; and when, long before the old gentleman's decease,

the young man's aspirations led him to declare to his senior that he thought the Hebraic name stood in their way in certain matters of business, and that he had some idea of taking some less-recognisable cognomen,—the old gentleman remarked, not without a touch of sarcasm in his voice, “Do ath you like, Daniel, ma tear; do ath you like. You’re a threwd lad, and are thure to turn out right; but underthand one thing, ma tear,—you may change your name if you like, but you’ll never be able to change your nothe.” Mr. Simeon Hart was right; nothing short of cutting off that feature could have disguised Mr. Daniel Thacker’s nationality. He was as distinctly marked as is the African; and though, with the addition of splendid sparkling black eyes, bright scarlet lips, a quantity of tightly-curling hair, and a fine flowing beard, he passed for a handsome man among certain of the other sex, there was no man to whom he had ever rendered a service—and he was in the main a kindly-disposed fellow so far as his profession permitted—but set him down for a “d—d Jew.”

He never forgot this, it was never absent from his thoughts. If he saw any one regarding him attentively, he felt at once what they were thinking about; it haunted him in the theatre, in society, wherever there was a chance of casual mention of his forsworn race. He had tried to laugh it over in his business discount-dealings with money-borrowers, asking them in a light and airy manner "why they came to the Jews," of whom they must have had such serious warnings: but the raillery always fell flat and heavy; and sometimes, from cubs of fashion, produced unintentional clumsy sarcasms which stung him to the quick. The renegade paid the penalty of his cowardice. With the blunted notions of an unrefined mind, he thought that the prejudice was levelled at his race, not at the character which the dealings of some of his nation had won for it, and which he himself was supporting. In his blindness he ignored the fact that amongst all those whose good word was worth having, the prejudice had died out; that the names of certain proud old Jewish families, who could trace their pedigree far beyond the barber-sur-

geon or border-robber founders of Norman or Scottish families, were honoured amongst the honoured; and that in any case a man who, brought into contact with a set socially superior to his own, took up his position calmly on the strength of his own acquirements, be these what they might, was received with a courtesy and a kindness which were naturally refused to the most glowing impostor. With Mr. Guyon Thacker had long had extensive dealings—dealings which had extended over a long course of years; but of late he had been a little doubtful of his client's solvency, a little delicate in the matter of renewals and holdings-over; and with a clouded brow he heard from his clerk the announcement that Mr. Guyon was waiting to see him in the ante-room. He reflected for a moment, and seemed half disposed to deny himself to his visitor; then carefully shutting the right-hand drawer of his desk, in which he kept his check-book, and placing the morocco-bound volume, which was a ledger, but looked like a diary, close by him, he said, "Show Mr. Guyon

in, James; I've just five minutes at his disposal."

Dressed in the most perfect manner, with all the latest improvements of fashion sufficiently tempered to his time of life, calm, collected, bland, and airy, yet with a certain amount of anxiety visible about his eyes and in the shifting corners of his mouth, Mr. Guyon entered the apartment and shook hands warmly with his friend.

Mr. Thacker received him civilly but not cordially, and expressed his hope that he saw Mr. Guyon well.

"Thanks, my dear Thacker," said that sprightly gentleman; "I think I may say, never in better case. I was getting a little pulled with the gaieties of the season—we old fellows can't carry it through like you young ones, you know—and I was, to tell truth, knocking up a bit; but last week I went down for a couple of days to Maidenhead—Orkney Arms, Skindle's, you know—where there was a particularly jolly party, all of them friends of yours, by the way,—Bob Affington and Adèle, and Dalrymple and O'Dwyer, and

Hattenheim and the Marchesa—a droll lot of people of the right sort—and we had great fun ; and it quite set me up. Every body said they wished you'd been down there.”

“Every body's very good,” replied Thacker, sufficiently grimly. He hated hearing of any pleasure which he had not shared. “Every body's very good ; but every body seems to forget that I've my business to attend to.”

“Business, my dear boy,” said Mr. Guyon, stretching out his legs and clasping his lavender-gloves in front of him ; “and have we not all business to transact ? I know, for one, that my time is nearly entirely devoted to business. Case in point, what brings me here to-day ?”

“That's exactly what I can't understand,” said Thacker with a rather sardonic smile ; “if it had been this day week,” he continued, referring to his ledger, “I should have known at once ; because on that day your acceptance for three hundred and fifty pounds falls due, and you would have come down to take it up.”

"Or to get you to renew," said Guyon insinuatingly.

"O, in that case you would have wasted your visit," replied Thacker; "that bill has been renewed once, and it is the rule of my house, as you know very well, never to do these things a second time."

He looked more than serious as he said this; but Mr. Guyon met his frown with a cheery laugh, and said in his most off-hand manner, "Well, my dear fellow, then it will be paid. Gad! you look as black as though thirty thousand instead of three hundred pounds were coming due from me next week. It's not for three hundred pounds that Ned Guyon, who has weathered one or two storms in his time, is going to pieces."

"N-no," said Thacker slowly; "but you see, though only three hundred and fifty are due next week, I hold a great deal of your paper, Mr. Guyon, in addition to other mortgages and advances on securities impossible to realise at once, and altogether I—in fact I—"

"Don't hesitate, sir," said Mr. Guyon, rising

with a flushed face and buttoning the lavender glove with a trembling hand, "don't make any favour of it, I beg. It's been a pure matter of business hitherto, Mr. Thacker—a pure matter of business, convenient to both of us, though I'm sure out of respect for you I've endeavoured to import a friendly element into our negotiations; a friendly element which, I may say, and indeed was one of the causes of my visit to you to-day; which might have been the means of—however, since you choose to look upon Ned Guyon with suspicion, Ned Guyon wishes you good morning." And Mr. Guyon settled his hat on his head, and was starting off in his usual easy swagger when he was stopped by the touch of Mr. Thacker's hand on his arm.

"Stay one minute, my good sir. Don't misunderstand me, if you please. I simply tell you that an acceptance of yours will be due next week, an acceptance which you avow your perfect readiness to meet, and you talk about my looking on you with suspicion. I am perfectly ready to allow that our relations have been of

a business nature ; but I thought that I might take credit for having introduced into them some of the elements of private friendship. You have done me the honour of dining with me, and—”

“ I have,” murmured Guyon absently ; “ and doosid good dinners they were.”

“ And yet you talk about suspicion. This is not fair, Mr. Guyon ; this is any thing but fair.”

“ ’Pon my soul, I didn’t mean any harm ; didn’t, ’pon my life,” said Mr. Guyon ; “ always found you doosid good fellow, Thacker, and that kind of thing—”

“ And yet you were going away without telling me of something which, if I understand you rightly, might be to our mutual benefit, and which you came down expressly to submit to me ? Is that so ?”

“ Dev’lish stoopid and childish of me to take affront so easily, more particklerly from good feller,” said Mr. Guyon. “ Yes, I did want to say word to you upon matter of importance—matter on which I think you’ll congratulate me.”

“ Sit down quietly, then, and let’s talk it over.

—The dry sherry, Evans, and a biscuit.—Any thing which benefits you interests me, Mr. Guyon—though all between us is ‘pure matter of business,’ eh? O, unkind, sir; very unkind!”

“There! forget that, Thacker, and listen to what I’ve got to tell you. You know my daughter,—at least you’ve seen her,” added Mr. Guyon, with a rather painful recollection of several broad hints which Thacker had given of his wish for an introduction to Katharine—hints which Mr. Guyon had always carefully ignored.

“I have seen Miss Guyon,” was the cold reply.

“Yes, of course, yes. Strange girl, very reserved, and—afraid of society.”

“Indeed?”

“O very! been a great drawback to her; but at last she has consented to come out, and—well, I don’t know that I ought to say it to any one, but you’re a man not likely to break confidence—she’s going to make a splendid match.”

“A splendid match, eh? A title?”

“A title? Pooh! much better than that! A

millionaire! one of the merchant princes of the City! A man whose name is good on 'Change for I don't know how much. What do you say to that, Thacker? Ned Guyon's in luck at last, eh?"

"It sounds very well, so far," said Mr. Thacker quietly, "Might one venture to ask the name of the modern Cræsus?"

"To any one else I should decline, peremptorily decline to give it; but it's different with you, Thacker; you're an old friend. The gentleman's name is Streightley—of the firm of Streightley and Son."

"Is it, by Jove!" cried Mr. Thacker, startled out of his usual quiescence. "Bullion Lane?—I know him well—by repute, that is to say, not personally. If you've hooked—I beg your pardon—if Mr. Streightley is going to marry Miss Guyon, you've done a splendid stroke of business."

"You think so?"

"Think so—I'm sure of it. They say that there's no more far-seeing man in the City, and his profits must be tremendous."

“Well, that’s the man. Now look here, Thacker, I’m open and aboveboard with you, as two men of the world, or rather two men of honour. Not the same thing, eh?” and the old man’s eye twinkled; “should be. This thing is well on, a little more will bring it to completion. One mustn’t, as they say, spoil the ship for a pennor’t of tar, eh? One mustn’t let a fine chance slip through one’s fingers for want of a little gold-dust to put on one’s hands to render the grip secure, eh?”

“I see your drift,” said Thacker; “but you must speak more plainly.”

“More plainly to you?” said Mr. Guyon in a whisper—unconsciously each man had lowered his voice. “Well, what I mean is this. If this scheme turns out well, as it will undoubtedly, if it be only properly carried out,—well—Katharine is devoted to me, she will rule her husband—O, never fear, she has the spirit of a dozen women!—and I shall be in clover once more, with all my arrears cleared off, and a handsome annuity! But the thing must be properly managed.

Streightley must not take fright at any aspect of poverty, or want of means rather; he must not for an instant imagine that I am in any way hampered" (the thought of the 180*l.* bill flashed across him, but he never changed countenance); "and he must be properly entertained; and Katharine must have a proper *trousseau*. He's not the man to speak about settlements," added Mr. Guyon; "and if he did, he must be told that there would be nothing until my death."

"And how is 'the thing to be properly managed,' and all the rest of it done?"

"I only know one way—and that is—"

"Speak out; you're not generally reticent on the score of modesty, Mr. Guyon."

"Well—that is—by you're holding over the three hundred and fifty due next week, and making me a further advance of—say a thousand, payable three months after my daughter's wedding-day."

Mr. Thacker was silent for a few minutes, nor could Mr. Guyon, intently scanning his face, derive the smallest idea from its expression.

Then he made a few rapid calculations on the blotting-pad in front of him, and said :

“ You play for a big stake, Mr. Guyon, and don’t stick at asking trifles from your friends. Now, I like a big game ; it at once invests any scheme with an interest for me which I cannot give to mere pottering petty hazards. And I don’t say that I won’t help you in this—on certain terms—only—”

“ Your terms will be your own, my good fellow,” cried Guyon, his eye sparkling at the thought of success. “ But I don’t like that ‘ only.’ What is it? Only what?”

“ Only that I should like to be introduced to Mr. Streightley, and have a little talk with him ; of course not on the subject under consideration, but on general topics, just to get an idea of him, you know. It’s a large sum to advance, in addition to outstanding matters ; and I’m a man of business, you know, Guyon, and like to see my way in these things.”

“ All right. Come down with me to the City, and we’ll hunt him up in his den.”

"No; I think not. We business-men don't like being hunted up in our dens, as you call them, unless our visitors bring us a carcass or two to growl over. You go over and see Streightley, and bring him here to lunch to-morrow at two. I leave you to find the excuse; your ready wit serves you always in such matters."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in Mr. Thacker's voice as he uttered these last words, but Mr. Guyon was in far too excited a state to perceive it. So he took his leave with much exuberant hand-shaking, and started off with much self-complacency. After his departure Mr. Thacker sat for some little time, leaning his head on his hands and his elbows on the desk, immersed in thought. "He's an unscrupulous vagabond, is Guyon!" said he to himself after a pause. "He's going to sell that handsome daughter of his, as he would a bit of land, or a diamond-ring, or a reversion under a will, or any thing that would bring him money. A determined heartless dog! But he seems to have either played his cards well or to have had great luck in hooking so big a

fish as Streightley. Robert Streightley! Yes, yes; they say he pulled the Ocean Marine through when Overend Gurneys had given them up and the knowing ones looked for an immediate wind-up, and now their shares are at 13 premium, and there are no end of the clever things he's done. He might be useful to me, might put me up to two or three wrinkles in the City, where all is big and where one's own natural talent has some chance of showing itself. Hitherto I've been pottering on with hard-up swells, and men of the Guyon stamp—safe business enough, and remunerative so far as it goes; pleasant too in its introductions to good people; but I know enough people now, and must look to making money as the chief thing. And this Streightley is the very man who could help me in such a matter. If I now see him, I'll back myself to read him like a book, and then I'll see how far this investment of Guyon's is worth my backing."

A telegram found by Mr. Thacker on his arrival at business the next morning announced that

Mr. Guyon and Mr. Streightley would lunch with him that day; and at two o'clock the meal was on the table and the convives were assembled. In addition to Guyon, Streightley, and the host, there were Lord Bollindar, a pleasant old nobleman, younger brother of a deceased and uncle to a live duke, who had a limited income of two hundred a-year and lived at the rate of two thousand—never owing a penny—on the strength of the handles to his name and a perennial flow of small talk; Sir Harvey Falmer, a lieutenant in the 2d Life Guards, who had dealings with Mr. Thacker, and who was kept to lunch on the strength of a recently negotiated bill; Mr. Wuff of the Theatre Royal, Hatton Garden; and Mr. Tocsin, Q.C., the celebrated Old Bailey barrister. The lunch was admirable in itself and admirably served; and after the champagne had circulated freely, the conversation, which at first had been rather slow, improved considerably.

“Doosid good champagne!” said Sir Harvey Falmer, tossing off his glassful; “that’s what I always say about you, Thacker; when you give a

man a drink, it's a good drink, and you give it him; don't stick it in—swipes and gooseberry, you know—as part of your balance.”

Mr. Thacker smiled somewhat ghastly at this witticism; but Lord Bollindar came to the rescue by saying, “Good, good! devilish smart, Falmer! but you fellas are in clover now. Why, I reckleckt the Dook—you reckleckt the Dook, Mr. Streightley?”

“I—I beg your pardon—the Duke?”

“Dook of Wellington I mean. He used to say, ‘Hang your still champagne!’—only his Grace used a stronger term—‘Hang your still champagne! Champagne without froth is like man without woman!’ Said so indeed, begad!”

“Did he indeed?” said Mr. Tocsin in his strident voice: “I should have liked to have had his Grace under cross-examination to prove that.”

“I don’t think you’d have made much of him, Tocsin,” said Mr. Thacker. “What do you think, Mr. Streightley?”

“I? I can’t say, of course, so far as my

knowledge of his Grace was concerned; but I'm sure—that—the presence of ladies elevates—and refines—and—”

“Of course it does,” cried Mr. Wuff. “Put on a fellow—I mean a male fellow—to dance, and see where you are. Patron of mine—noble lord who shall be nameless—said to me the other night, ‘Never again, Wuff; never again. Many petticoats as you like; but if ever I see again a fellow in a low-necked dress with grapes in his hair dancing at your theatre, damme, I leave the house.’”

“The sentiment did him honour, whoever he was,” said Mr. Tocsin. “I don’t want to pry into your secrets, Wuff, but the man was right, and spoke like—a man. What is it nerves to our best efforts? What is it makes us exert ourselves? Not the thought of the jury—I speak for myself—not the thought that we are—are—bending the minds of a few stupid men in—in a box; but the feeling that we are looked up to and gaining renown in the eyes of—of—those bright eyes which we wish to shine in delight upon our labours.”

"Bravo!" cried Sir Harvey Falmer, who was rapidly falling into a maudlin state.

"Look at our friend here," said Lord Bollindar, pointing to Streightley; "one of—as I'm given to understand; never had the pleasure of meeting him before—pillars of British commerce. Ask him what prompts his men—Jack Tars and all that kind of thing—to brave storms and billows and typhoons, and whatever they're called, and carry British commerce from pole to pole. Is it the mere paltry gain, wages, advance-rate, whatever it is? No; the poet, what's his name?—Dibdin—has told us different: Jack's delight is lovely Nan,—And the wind that blows,—And mill that goes,—And lass that loves a sailor—and all that."

"There can, I think," said Streightley, "be little doubt that the influence of a—a wife—can scarcely be overrated. I—I think," he added in a lower tone to Mr. Guyon, who was his next neighbour, "that I've not sufficiently appreciated feminine influence; but that is a fault which can be remedied, eh?" And he said this rather nervously.

"To a man with your advantages, my dear boy," said Guyon, "delay, instead of being dangerous, has been, I may say, a safeguard. I was making this very remark—for, curiously enough, I've taken a strong interest in you—to my daughter this morning, and she perfectly agreed with me."

This for a sample of the conversation. When his guests had gone, Mr. Thacker stood looking at but not seeing the *debris* of the banquet. He was calmly feeling his chin with his hand, and saying to himself, "So far so good. The man is weak as water, and seems inclined to mould himself as old Guyon pleases. But I must have a look at the girl before I throw myself into the scales."

CHAPTER V.

HESTER GOULD.

"No one but Miss Hester Gould," the old nurse had answered, in reply to Robert Streightley's question; and he had never bestowed a thought upon the answer. What was Hester Gould to him, or he to Hester Gould? To the first section of this inquiry the present chapter will furnish a reply; to the second, time only; time, just then busy with the beginning of many complications in the life of a man whose career had been singularly even, uneventful, and interesting only so far as it had developed his abilities and the results of their employment.

The young lady, whose brief parley with Alice had simply consisted of the words reported to her master and darling by the old nurse, had known the unpretending little family at Brixton for

several years, and had been, for the chief of that number, intimate with Mrs. Streightley and her daughter Ellen. This intimacy, however, was one-sided; Hester Gould was completely in the harmless and unimportant confidence of the two ladies, but they were not in hers. This was no treacherous, insidious distinction, no deliberate preference of other friends, on Hester Gould's part; for she was a woman who gave her confidence to no one; a woman of a self-sufficing nature, and the safest possible confidante, because she never felt sufficiently interested in any one person to betray another for his or her sake. No one could justly accuse Hester Gould of flattery or fawning, yet she induced her acquaintances to conceive enthusiastic friendships for her, and to tell her their most intimate concerns, to discover that she was indispensable to their comfort, and the dearest creature in the world; to declare that they did not know what they should do without her, and that her advice was always the best. How did the girl, without descending to the despicable meanness of toadyism,

achieve popularity in her narrow sphere, though she was undeniably handsome, and that too after a fashion that was capable of development into downright beauty of a high type, if circumstances had been more favourable to her? She achieved it by "masterly inactivity." Whether she had thought over the life that lay before her, had formed a philosophy of her own, and decided upon a line of conduct as the result of her meditations, before she left the second-rate boarding-school at Peckham, where she had acquired all the technical education she possessed, it would be impossible to say, and the supposition that she had done so appears unnatural and far-fetched. It was probably partly by the instinct of native shrewdness, and partly by the exercise of precocious powers of observation, that Hester Gould discovered that the great art of making herself agreeable consisted in letting her friends talk to her of themselves, without claiming a reciprocal right. However that may have been, she observed as a rule strict reticence concerning her own affairs, and endured with smiling patience, paying her friends that

subtlest of compliments, undivided attention ; and displaying interest, which if not demonstrative was practical, in the fullest details concerning theirs. She was of a cold, silent, repressed nature, not exactly unamiable or false ; but a woman who might become either under circumstances more disadvantageous than hers were at present, or might expand under favourable and fostering influences into a higher type of womanhood than she either physically or intellectually indicated now.

Hester Gould was a handsome woman at twenty, a period of life which she had reached only a few days before that on which she had made affectionate inquiries for Ellen Streightley ; but she would probably be a handsomer woman at thirty, and if she then fulfilled the latent promise of beauty, would have a fair chance of retaining it long past the period at which the loveliness of women, in all but very exceptional cases, ceases to be a fact, and becomes a memory. She was tall and full-formed ; but as yet she wanted gracefulness. She had handsome features and fine keen dark eyes ; but her face had not sufficient

colour, and her eyes had too little depth; they lacked intensity; not that they were shifty and uncertain, but that they bore the vague, absent expression which tells of discontent, not particular but general. Looking attentively at Hester Gould, one given to studying character in faces would know that there was incongruity between the actual and the potential position of the girl. Without restlessness, without impatience, always ruled by common sense, she seemed to be a person who had something in view, which if not a firm resolve, was at least a cherished purpose. The tenor of her life was even and simple enough, and there was nothing remarkable in her history. Her parents had been plain people: her father, secretary to an old-established insurance office, had patronised the concern to the extent of securing a decent sum for the maintenance of his sister and only child. Her mother, who had "disobliged her family," as the phrase is, by her marriage, had died when Hester was a baby; and the only member of the disobliged family now living was a wealthy ship-owner, who had declined to take any notice of the

sister who had disgraced herself by wedding a poor man. Mr. Gould came of parents quite as well-born as his wife's: they were all of the respectable tradesman class; but their standard was one of money value, and he did not come up to it. They might have helped him to approach it, without inconveniencing themselves; but they did not consider or care about that, and the breach had been complete; indeed it had soon become irremediable; for Mrs. Gould had survived her marriage only four years, and had died, taking her infant son with her away from all family quarrels and human affairs. Hester grew up, under the kindly, timid, narrow-minded charge of her aunt; a meek spinster given to the perusal and distribution of tracts, and to the frequentation of meeting-houses where the doctrine was strong and the preaching unctuous. The child became "too much" for her timid aunt and her depressed father at an early period of her existence, and even rebelled against the vicarious authority of Miss Gould's favourite "ministers;" so she was sent to school, and there also she gave no little trouble for

a time. But common sense was always Hester's strong point; and it came to her assistance. School was far from pleasant, she reflected, but home was worse; and as she had no power to provide herself with a third alternative at present, she would abide by the lesser of two evils, and turn it to all the advantage she could. The result of this rational conclusion was that Hester Gould profited to the utmost by the limited quantity and mediocre quality of the education administered at Laburnum Lodge, and acquired at least a foundation on which to build afterwards according to her taste.

The discretion evinced by the schoolgirl was a clue to her character. No one was more popular among the small and far from distinguished community; but only the girls whose social position was a little higher than her own could claim Hester as an intimate friend. The gushing nonsense of school friendships had little attraction for her, and she contracted none that she did not contemplate maintaining when the association which had produced them should have ceased. Hester was not

brilliantly clever, there was not the least *souppçon* of genius about her; but she was certainly a superior person in intellect, in manners, and in appearance, to the companions of her studies, the sharers of her school life, in that most unbearable kind of intimacy which means contact without companionship. When she went home for the holidays, things were not much better. She had been fond of her father in a quiet way, though she had taken his intellectual measure pretty accurately, and almost as soon as she had arrived at the conclusion that their life was on a dull mean scale, had recognised his inability to elevate or enliven it.

"We should grub on like this all our lives, if it depended on *him*," the girl had said to herself in emphatic, if not elegant soliloquy; and there had been no wilful disrespect to the honest, humdrum, unobservant father in the remark, only Hester's unclouded perception and resolute custom of telling herself the truth. When she was a little over fifteen years old her father died, and she had to endure, in addition to her natural grief, which was unfeigned and sore, a declension in position, and

a narrowing of the narrow income, which at its best she had regarded with impatience, very keen though never expressed, or permitted to escape her by so much as a gesture. Her aunt moved into a smaller house in an inferior situation, discharged one of the two female servants who had composed their modest establishment, and told Hester she hoped she had profited sufficiently by her music and singing lessons to go on without a master, for she could no longer afford to continue them.

Hester bore the alteration with apparent equanimity, but she took a resolution and acted upon it. She was a musician by nature, and music was the one branch of study to which she had taken with avidity, and which she had pursued with unrelaxed industry. She went to the school-mistress (the establishment had not yet attained to the distinction of possessing a "lady principal"), and asked her to put her in the immediately-to-be-vacated place of a pupil-teacher, allowing her to continue her own music and singing lessons as an equivalent for her services. The proposition took

Miss Nickson by surprise; but she knew Hester Gould's abilities and popularity, and though she did not like the girl particularly, she trusted her fully. It never occurred to the schoolmistress—a simple woman, and a favourable specimen of a generally disagreeable class—that Hester had not made the proposition at her aunt's suggestion, while that young lady contented herself with informing Miss Lavinia Gould by letter of what she had done. “I don't lose caste by it here, where they all know me and I have been on equal terms with them,” thought Hester; “and my only chance of getting out of our odious mean existence is by making all I can of such education as I can get. I shall have to teach anyhow, and I can fit myself for teaching a better class of people here.” It was not a stupid calculation for so young a head, and it turned out perfectly correct. Hester did not lose caste when her schoolfellows became her pupils, and her teachers in their turn took additional pains with her when they knew the object with which she was learning.

Among Hester's intimates for several of her

school years was Ellen Streightley, a girl who loved and worshipped one who was in most respects her opposite with a kind of enthusiasm not rare among unworldly natures, in which the intellect is much less powerful than the feelings. The boarding-school at Peckham was not altogether such an establishment as Miss Streightley should have been kept at beyond the period of primary instruction; but her mother was a shy, gentle, unworldly woman, who did not understand any thing about social ambition, and provided she found her daughter brought up in sound morals and good manners would not have considered for a moment whether her associates were of a higher class than her own, or came of richer or poorer people. Mrs. Streightley had never changed her mode of life in accordance with her increased means; she had but a narrow circle, which was, however, quite satisfactory to her, and she regarded the commercial and financial magnates with whom her son associated on the rare occasions of his "going into society," as completely out of the sphere of herself and her daughter. This daughter was very

dear to her; a tranquil, gentle, congenial companion, a child who had never given her an hour's true anxiety in her life, and had even had the measles and the whooping-cough much more lightly and favourably than other children. Ellen Streightley was short, slight, and extremely fair. She was not exactly pretty, but the calm sweetness of her face was very winning, and the perfect candour and gentleness which sat upon her smooth forehead and looked out of her full blue eyes had an unwearied charm for those who knew how true these indications were of the mind and heart within. Ellen Streightley loved her mother and her brother Robert with all the devotion and dutifulness of her nature; but Hester Gould she loved with enthusiasm in addition. From the first Hester's strong mind had charmed and swayed her, and the imagination of the girl, not very vivid and but rarely awakened, had surrounded her with a halo of its weaving. Had Hester's moral nature been much or openly defective, she never would have won this tribute of love and worship from Ellen Streightley, who had good sense

to come in aid of her high principle, and her perfect purity of heart, but who succumbed to the superiority of Hester with a delighted submission. When they were children together, Hester's word had been the other's law, and had any thing been needed to perfect her love and admiration, Hester's conduct in voluntarily assuming the position of pupil-teacher in order that her aunt might suffer as little as possible from their narrow circumstances would have supplied their complement. There was no falsehood in this statement, made by Hester to her friend. It was quite true, only it was not the whole of her motive, but a part, and not the chief part of it.

And Hester—what was her share in this strict and loving alliance? Decidedly she liked Ellen Streightley very much, and she prized highly, without comprehending it altogether, the enthusiastic affection of which she was the object, the unreserved confidence of which she was the recipient. She liked the Saturdays and Sundays which she passed at Mrs. Streightley's house at Brixton, when Ellen's schooldays had come to a

conclusion, and her friend coaxed Miss Lavinia Gould to spare Hester to her; a request that lady did not hesitate to grant, as she had very little need of her niece's society; her "Sabbaths," as she punctiliously called them, being passed in hot untiring chase of popular preachers, according to her notions of popularity and estimate of preachers. She declined to join the family party on Sundays, firstly on Sabbatarian principles, secondly because the Streightleys were "Church of England," and she hated that persuasion only a little less than the Roman Communion, and the opposition chapel which set itself against the ministrations of her own particular pastor and saint, the Rev. Malachy Farrell, a powerful controversialist, and a convert from the Romish heresy and abomination of desolation. Ellen had enjoined her mother to exert herself to "make a connection" for Hester, when her days of pupil-teachership came to a conclusion; that lady had obediently exerted herself; Miss Nickson had done as much for the girl, with whom she had never had occasion to find a fault, but who, she rather remorsefully admitted to

herself, had never "gained on her" in all the years of their association; and Hester, at twenty years old, when we meet her first, was established as a teacher of music, with a respectable connection, and occupied with her aunt a pretty small house near the Brixton Villa, which, in elegance and habitableness was a considerable improvement on that in which her father had lived and died.

Ellen Streightley had never cooled or wavered in her love for Hester; and her mother liked the girl very much, though she sometimes had an uncomfortable sort of feeling that she did not understand her perfectly, that Hester might perhaps be "too much" for her and Ellen, if she should think it worth her while to be so. But the kind lady was little given to mental exercises of any troublesome description, and never thought of analysing her sensations. That she was an exceptional person, singularly unsuspecting, and unlike mothers in general, may surely be conceded, when it is stated that it never occurred to her to think that Hester might possibly be a dangerous intimate for Robert, her beloved and

precious son, or could cherish any design or idea whereof he made part. Mrs. Streightley loved her son better than she loved Ellen ; a preference which the girl accepted as a matter of course, and believed to be perfectly just and well founded. He was Robert, their Robert, the most important, the most beloved of men, and of course it was all right ; and the two women did but follow the example of thousands of their sex, whose perceptions and ideas are confined within a small circle, and whose social sphere and enjoyments resemble a mill, and the going round therein performed by patient and tolerably well-fed beasts. Robert was an amiable man on the whole ; he gave no more trouble in the household than was inseparable from the circumstance that he was a man and "didn't understand things," as the household phrase has it, and he loved his mother devotedly, and Ellen very much indeed. It had never occurred to him that her life was a dull one, and that he was rich enough to make it a very different life, if he would but waken up and look away from his counting-house, learn sympathy, and

consider what was the real meaning and worth of money. He had never thought of the light and colour, the stir and healthful pleasure he might diffuse through the decorous, comfortable, neutral-tinted existence of the Brixton Villa; he had never noticed their absence; and as he had no notion of the life led by other girls, on whom money was lavishly expended, and for whose delectation whole household systems were organised, there was no standard of comparison in his mind. He was so much older than his sister, so much nearer his mother's age than hers, that while perfect affection had always subsisted between them, it had not been accompanied with much intimacy, and his confidences, which were wholly confined to business matters, had been restricted to his mother, on whose mind it had never dawned that any improvement in their household affairs could be desirable, who had never looked or desired to look outside the circle in which she moved, and who would have received any suggestion of an increase of Ellen's social opportunities and enjoyments with entire

incredulity. To her Ellen was as yet little more than a child; and though if he had been asked what was her age, and had paused to think the matter over, Robert would have perceived the absurdity of so regarding a girl of nineteen, by no means childish of her years, though simple and unworldly as few children are in these progressive days, he practically shared her delusion.

Robert was almost as much accustomed to see Hester Gould as he was to see Ellen. The girls were together as much as possible, due consideration being had to Hester's occupations, and the social duties and privileges of her "connection," which she never neglected. She led an infinitely pleasanter life than did Ellen; for she was very popular among her pupils, and many of their number contrived to extend to her their own amusements and pleasures. She had not much leisure, but she was under no painful necessity to overwork herself; her occupation need never degenerate into slavery, and such hours as she could devote to recreation she could always find

recreation to fill. She possessed perfect health and an even temper; not according to the cynical saying, "A good digestion and a bad heart,"—not yet, at least. Up to the present time nothing in Hester's conduct had indicated badness of heart; a little coldness perhaps, but unperceived, and resolution whose inflexibility might have been suspected, but that her resolves had all been in the direction of right and duty. If any body had asked Robert Streightley whether he was acquainted with Miss Hester Gould, he would have unhesitatingly replied that he knew her most intimately—as well as his own sister; and he would have made such an answer in perfectly good faith. It would not have been true, nevertheless. If any one had asked Hester Gould whether she knew Robert Streightley, she would have replied that he was an acquaintance of hers, being the brother of one of her dearest friends—(Hester would not have said her "dearest friend," for such a sweeping phrase might have been repeated to her detriment); and she would have said it in a tone calculated to convince the questioner that

her acquaintance with Mr. Streightley was of the most formal and conventional kind. In this instance the reply would only have had the exterior of truth, for no one in the world—certainly not the man himself—knew Robert Streightley as well, as thoroughly as Hester Gould knew him. Not his sister, who would talk cheerily about her brother, and extol his genius, his temper, and his personal appearance; not his mother, who would tell Hester a dozen times in a week that he had never caused her an hour's anxiety, and who never admitted that he had a fault, except his tiresome objection to sitting for his photograph; not the old nurse, who would scold Robert freely enough herself, but in whose hearing no one would have had the boldness to declare him subject to the faults, the misfortunes, or the maladies of humanity. It was a fortunate circumstance that Hester Gould had perfectly read Robert Streightley's character, and had, without any thing like impertinent inquisitiveness, acquired a thorough knowledge of the family history and his personal antecedents; for, some time before the period of her friend's

visit to Yorkshire, Hester Gould had made up her mind that she would marry Robert Streightley if possible, and Ellen's last letter had induced her to think of doing so at an earlier period than she had previously contemplated.

"I don't know that Ellen's marriage will not be the best thing that could possibly happen for me," said Hester to herself as she walked briskly away from Robert Streightley's house, after her parley with old Alice. "Of course her brother won't oppose it,—though the girl is a greater fool than I thought her, to marry a man with no greater ambition than to spend his life among filthy savages, teaching them a religion entirely unsuitable to their condition of life and status in creation. I hope they won't eat him—at least I hope they won't eat *her*; but she will be better away—I should never succeed in curing her of Brixton ways, and she has really no tastes to be developed. It will be a good opportunity, when she will be divided between love for her Decimus—what a name to be in love with!—and distress

at leaving her mother, to furnish her with a suggestion concerning a substitute: it must come entirely from her, of course."

Thus thinking, Hester Gould reached home. She greeted aunt Lavinia kindly; she was scrupulously dutiful and attentive to her wishes, except in respect to meetings and ministers;—sat down cheerfully to her tea, during which meal she quite enlivened the pensive spinster by her gaiety, and then went to her piano for what she called a "real good practice." Hour after hour she sat there, filling the room and the house with music; and at length she sang, at her aunt's request, the very same song—of a trifling kind, which Hester rather despised, but sang because it was popular—with which Katherine Guyon was at the self-same hour achieving the "final pulverisation" of Robert Streightley's heart.

CHAPTER VI.

IN CHAMBERS.

THE summer sun, bright, warm, and cheering, only just past the zenith of his annual glory, illuminated the Temple Gardens; still further withering the turf, which had been worn by the promenaders of the season into a very bald and ragged state; gladdening the hearts of country-bred nursemaids with reminiscences of their earlier days, when their virgin hearts were yet untouched by the charms of deceivers in military or police uniforms; loved and cherished by the valetudinarians, poor and old, to whom this city garden was the nearest imitation of God's country which they were able to afford, and who, secluded during the winter in Strand side-street lodging-houses, ventured thither for their daily meed of light and air; glancing merrily on the turbid Thames; and

even throwing enlivening glances into the topmost story of the house in Crown-Office Row, which Robert Streightley had visited one memorable night, and wherein one of its joint tenants now sat hard at work.

And indeed, let him come when he might, in his spring weakness, in his summer glory, in his autumn grandeur, in the feeble struggles which he made during winter, the sun would never have found Charles Yeldham in any other condition. Work was his life, his idol. As a very young man, when he first quitted Oxford, he had prayed to be successful in the profession which he had chosen, and which he had gone into heart and soul. He had vowed that if his labours were only rewarded with success, there should be scarcely any end to them; and now, when he had no rival as a conveyancing barrister among his coevals and very few superiors among his seniors, he still kept grinding on. Not intended by nature for such slavery, as you can tell in one glance at his *physique*, at his broad chest, long sinewy arms and legs, and big white hands; not destitute

of an appreciation of fun, as you can see in his bright blue eyes, his large happy mouth, and the deep dimples of his cheeks; what would be generally called a "jolly man," with thick brown curling hair, and a clear skin, and a great hearty laugh, breaking out whenever it had the chance.

Which was not very often. There is nothing very humorous in conveyancing, and in conveyancing Charles Yeldham's life was passed. Gordon Frere, returning from a ball, a supper, or one of his "outings," would hear the roar of Yeldham's shower-bath as he came up the stairs, or would see him, bright and rosy, deep in his books or scratching away with his pen, as he, Frere, with his gibus hat on one side, his collars danced down into a state of limp despondency, and with a faded camellia in his button-hole, peered into the common sitting-room before he crawled to bed. Five in the summer, six in the winter,—these were Charles Yeldham's hours of rising. Then, after his cold bath and his hurried toilette, what he called "treadmill" till eight. A sharp run five times round the Temple Gardens, no matter what

the weather, a hurried breakfast—chop, bacon, eggs, what-not, and at it again, “treadmill” till two. Bread-and-cheese, a pint-bottle of Allsopp, a pipe—generally smoked as he leaned out of the window looking on to the river—and “treadmill” till half-past six. Old shooting-coat changed for more presentable garment, hands washed, and Mr. Yeldham walked to the Oxford and Cambridge Club, where he would eat a light dinner, take a very small quantity of wine, and walk back to the Temple to have a final turn of “treadmill” until half-past eleven, when he would turn into bed. He had reduced sleep to a minimum, ascertained that five and a half hours were exactly sufficient for a man, and never wasted a wink.

There was no absolute occasion for Charles Yeldham to slave in this manner; but when he commenced his work he had had a powerful incentive to industry, and he had found the work grow on him until he absolutely took delight in it. He was the only son of the Honourable and Reverend Stratford Yeldham, a cadet of the Aylmer family, who had been content to marry the daughter of

the clergyman with whom he read during one long vacation, and afterwards to go into orders and take up the family living in Norfolk. The living was not a very rich one, and Charley, who loved his father after a fashion not very common now amongst young men, and who knew that the old gentleman had somewhat pinched and straitened himself to send his son to college with a proper allowance, had made up his mind not only that all that had been spent on him should be repaid, but that his sister Constance—his own dear little sister—should have such a dowry as would enable her to decline any offer whose advantages were merely pecuniary, and at the same time to bring an adequate income to the man of whom her heart should approve. The hope of accomplishing this end lightened Charles Yeldham's labour, and kept him at his desk and among his law-books without an idea of repining, generally indeed with a sense of positive pleasure.

He was at his desk that pleasant summer afternoon, when all nature outside was so bright and gay, so deeply engaged, that he paid not the

slightest attention to the sound of the key in the outer door, and only looked up when he felt a hand on his shoulder and saw Gordon Frere standing beside him.

"Grinding away, Charley," said that young gentleman; "hard at it as usual."

"Just the same as ever, old boy," replied Yeldham; "but just as ready as ever to knock off for five minutes—exactly five minutes, mind—and have a chat with you. So there!"—laying down his pen—"now then, let's begin. Where have you been all the morning? I say, you're rather a greater swell than usual, are you not, Gordon?"

"Eh—swell? no, I don't think so. Emerged just a little bit from the chrysalis state perhaps, but not much. But the least bit of colour lights up tremendously and looks radiant beside your old blacks and grays. What a fellow you are, Charley! I wish you'd go in for another style of toggery, and just go to Poole."

"Go to Poole? God forbid!" said Yeldham with ludicrous energy. "Why, my dear fellow, if

I were to be seen in a coat of that sort"—touching the silk-lined skirts of Frere's frock—"or in a pair of trousers that fitted me like those, there's not an attorney in London would give me any more employment. No, sir! In Store Street, Tottenham-Court Road, resides the artificer who for years has built my garments on what he assures me are sound mathematical principles, and I shall continue to employ him until one of us is removed to a sphere where clothes are unnecessary. And now, once more, where have you been all this morning?"

"Ah! that's exactly what I came home to talk to you about. I've been calling on a deuced pretty girl, Master Charley, and I want to tell you all about it."

"A very pretty girl, eh?" said Yeldham in rather a hard tone of voice. "A very pretty girl! All right, my boy; tell away."

"I think I've mentioned her before, Charley," said Frere; "Miss Guyon—Kate Guyon, daughter of old Guyon, whom you've heard me speak of; a member of the club, you know; fellow who

plays a deuced good game of whist, and that kind of thing. And the girl's really wonderful; very handsome, and with a regular well-bred look about her. None of your dumpy, dowdy, slummakin women—I hate that style—but tall and elegant; carries herself well, and has plenty to say for herself—when she chooses.”

“When she chooses, eh!” said Yeldham, with a slight smile; “and I suppose she does choose—to you.”

“Well, you know, that's not for a fellow to say. She's always been very civil; and I rode with her yesterday in the Park, and was in her box at the Opera last night—when I say her box I mean Lady Henmarsh's, the old cat who is her principal chaperone—and we got on capitally together, and I think it was all right. I should have told you of it when I got home, but I looked into your room, and you were sound as a top; or this morning, but you were closeted in the office with some fellow on business. So I went off to call on her—there was a kind of tacit arrangement that I should do so—and, by George, I really

think I'm hit this time, and that I mean more than ever I did before."

"Mean more! In what way, Gordon?"

"In the way of marriage, of course, you old idiot. Mean that if I were to ask her, I think she'd have me. And she'd be a deuced creditable wife to have about with one; and the governor must just stir himself, and use his influence and get me a consulship, or a commissionership, or something where there's a decent income, and not very much to do for it. There are such things, of course."

"I don't know, Gordon. Recollect these are the days when every thing is won by merit, and not won without a competitive examination."

"O yes; competitive examination be hanged! I'm not going in for any thing of that sort. If a man who's sat for the same borough for five-and-twenty years, and never voted against his party except once, by mistake, when he'd been dining out and strolled into the wrong lobby—if such a patriot as this can't get a decent berth for his son without any bother about examination and all that

kind of thing, where are our privileges as citizens? O no; that'll come all square, of course. But what do you advise me about the girl?"

"It's difficult to give such advice off-hand, Gordon, more especially as I have never seen the young lady, and have scarcely heard of her. But though you're not particularly learned, young un, you've plenty of knowledge of the world, and are one of the last men likely to be entrapped into a silly marriage, or to let yourself be made miserable for life by giving in to a mere passing fancy. So if you and the young lady are really fond of each other, and if your father can be persuaded to give himself the trouble to get some tolerably decent Government appointment for you, I should say, 'Propose to her like an honourable man; and God speed you!' I—I think I should see my father first, Gordon, and make sure of what he would do; for, from all I've heard, I don't think Mr. Guyon is a man of resources—I mean pecuniary resources."

"N-no," said Frere; "I should not think he was. He's a remarkably chirpy old boy, tells

very good stories, and is always well got-up; but I shouldn't think his balance at his banker's was very satisfactory. However, Kate's simply charming; stands out from all the ruck of girls one knows, and is in the habit of meeting and dancing with, like a star. I'll write down to the governor and sound him about what he'd be inclined to do; and I'll just go round before dinner to Queen Anne Street; not to go in, you know,—of course not; but there's the last Botanical Fête to-morrow in the Regent's Park, and Kate asked me if I was going, and I said I'd go if she went, and she said she'd try and get some one to take her. I suppose the old woman who's always about with her doesn't care for dissipation by daylight. I say, Charley, fancy if it comes off all straight! Fancy me a married man!"

Yeldham smiled, but said nothing. There was scarcely any occasion for him to speak; for Frere was full of his subject, and rattled on.

"How astonished your people will be! I can see the Vicar reading your letter announcing the news through his double eyeglass, and then hand-

ing it over to little Constance and exclaiming, 'Won-derful!' And Constance with her large solemn gray eyes, and her pert nose, and her fresh little mouth; Constance, whom I used to call 'my little wife' when I was grinding away with the Vicar in those jolly days—ah! what a glorious old fellow he is!—won't she be surprised when she finds I've got a real wife! And you,—you'll be left alone in chambers, Charley, old boy; all alone!—though you don't see much of me as it is, do you, old fellow?"

"No, Gordon; not much," said Yeldham rising; "not so much as I should wish. But it's pleasant to me to look forward to your coming, to bring a little of the outside world's life and light into these dreary old rooms, and to prove to me that I am not actually part and parcel of these musty old books and parchments, as I'm sometimes half inclined to believe. However, I could not expect to have you always with me, any more than I could expect it to be always summer; and indeed, if you were always here, I should not know what to do with you. Come, my five minutes' rest has

been prolonged into a perfect idleness. Out with you, and let me get to work again !”

“ No, no ; not yet, Charley. It’s so seldom I have the chance of getting you to take your nose off the paper, and to open your ears to any thing that is not law-jargon, that I’m not going to give in so soon. Besides, I’ve been talking all this time, and now it’s your turn. I want your advice, and you’re going to give it me ; and that’s all about it.”

“ It’s a great pity you don’t stick to your profession, Gordon,” said Yeldham, half laughingly, half in earnest ; “ you would have made a great success at the Old Bailey. You’ve all the characteristics of that style of practice charmingly developed ; plenty of cheek, plenty of volubility, and supreme self-reliance. If you had done me the honour of listening to me instead of thinking what you were going to say next, you would have heard me advise you half an hour ago.”

“ Stuff ! I heard you fast enough. Propose to the girl, and all that ; very honourable and straightforward, you know, Charley, but a little

old-fashioned, you know,—at least you don't know; how should you, shut up in this old hole? But what I mean to say is, fellows don't propose to girls nowadays, old fellow, except in books and on the stage, and that sort of thing. You understand each other, you know, without going on your knees, or 'plighting troth,' or any rubbish of that kind. But what I want to know is, what is my line towards the old party—Guyon père?"

"Hold on a minute, Gordon," said Charles Yeldham rising from his chair, plunging his hands into his trousers' pockets, and taking up his position of vantage on the hearth-rug. "Granted all you say about my being old-fashioned, you yet seem to think that there is a phase of courtship sufficiently unchanged—I was going to say sufficiently natural—for me to be able to advise you upon."

"He-ar, he-ar!" said Mr. Frere, knocking the table on which he was seated.

"But before I attempt to give you any advice, I must know whether you are really in earnest in

this business. Yes; I know you say you're 'hard hit,' and 'serious this time,' and a lot of stuff that I've heard you say a dozen times before about a dozen different girls. What I want to know is, do you really think seriously of marrying Miss Guyon? Has it entered your mind to regard it from any other point than the mere calf-love view, what you in your slang call 'being spooney' upon her? I mean, Gordon, old fellow,—I'm a solemn old fogey, you know; but it's in the fogey light that such a solemn thing should be looked at—are you prepared to take Miss Guyon as your wife?"

"On my sacred honour, Charley, there's nothing would make me so happy."

"Then the honourable way to go to work is to see Mr. Guyon at once and speak to him. Tell him your feelings and—"

"And my prospects, eh, Charley? He's safe to ask about them."

"Well, you can tell him what you've just said of your father's position, and what you intend to ask him to do for you. And then—"

“Yes; and then?”

“Well, then you’ll hear what he’s got to say to that.”

“Ye-es; it won’t take me very long to listen to an exposition of Mr. Guyon’s views on my financial position, I take it. However, I’m almost certain—quite certain, I may say—of Kate; and as you think it’s due to her to speak to her father—”

“I’m sure of it, Gordon. It’s the only honourable course.”

“Well, then, I’ll do it at once, though I don’t much like it, I can tell you.”

“Whatever may be the result, it’s best you should know it soon, Gordon. Nothing unfits a man for every thing so much as being in a state of doubt.”

“I’ll end mine at once, Charley. No; not at once. I must first see if that Botanical-fête arrangement is coming off, and after that I’ll speak to her father. Devilish solemn phrase that, eh, Charley!”

“It won’t be so dreadful in carrying out as it

sounds, my boy: Clear out now ; you shan't have another instant !”

Gordon Frere nodded laughingly at his friend ; and after making a hurried toilet in his own room started off for Queen Anne Street, while Charles Yeldham seated himself at his desk.

But not to work ; his mind was too full for that. The short light conversation just recorded had given Charles Yeldham matter for much deliberation. When a man's life is thoroughly engrossed by mental work, the few humanising influences which he allows to operate on him are infinitely more absorbing than the thousand fleeting affections of the light-hearted and the thoughtless. When Charles Yeldham gave his thoughts a holiday from his conveyancing, and turned them from the attorneys who employed him and the work which they brought him to do, his mind reverted generally to the loved ones in the vicarage at home or to the two men whose friendship he had time and opportunity to cultivate. Never was younger brother better loved than was Gordon Frere by the large-hearted, large-brained

philosopher whose chambers he shared. It was indeed from the elder-brother point of view that Yeldham regarded Frere. As a boy Gordon had been the one private pupil whom the old vicar had admitted into his house ; and later in life he had passed two long vacations reading at the sea-side with his old tutor and the members of his family. Charley loved the young man with all the large capacity of his loving nature, looked with the most lenient eye on his boyish frivolities and dissipations, and had hitherto never feared for his future, hoping that he would settle down into some useful career before he thought of settling himself for life. But the conversation just held had entirely changed his ideas. Gordon, unstable, unsettled, without any means or resources, had announced his intention of taking a wife. And what a wife ! Of the young lady herself Yeldham knew nothing ; but certain pleadings which he had drawn some twelve months beforehand in a case which never came into court, and which had been settled by mutual arrangement, had given him a very clear insight into the character of Mr. Edward

Scrope Guyon, and into that worthy gentleman's resources and manner of life. With such a man Yeldham felt perfectly certain that an impecunious scion of a good family like Gordon Frere coming as a pretender for his daughter's hand would not have the smallest chance of success ; and it was with a heavy heart that he sat idly sketching figures on his blotting-pad, and turning over all that he had recently heard in his mind.

"I don't see my way out of it," said he, throwing down his pen at length, and plunging his hands into his pockets. "I don't see my way out of it, and that's the truth. Gordon is hard hit, I believe,—harder hit than he has ever been yet, and means all fairly and honourably ; but fair play and honour won't avail much, I imagine, in carrying out this connection—at least with the male portion of the family. A man with the morals of a billiard-marker and an income of a couple of thousand a-year would have a better chance with old Guyon than a Bayard or a Galahad. He's a bad lot, this Mr. Guyon, but as sharp as a ferret, and he'll read Gordon like a

book. All the poor boy's talk about what his political influence and what his father must do for him, and all that, won't weigh for an instant with a man like Guyon, who is up to every move on the board, and who will require money down from any one bidding for his daughter's hand. I wonder what the girl's like, and how much of the play rests in her hands. That old rip would never be base enough to make her his instrument in advancing his own fortune? And yet how often it's done, only in a quieter and less noticeable manner! Gad! I begin to think I am a bit of a cynic, as Gordon chaffingly calls me, when I find these ideas floating through my head; and I'm sure any one would imagine I was one, or worse, if, knowing my own convictions, they had heard me advise that poor boy to see old Guyon and lay his statement before him. But I'm convinced that that is the only way of dealing with such a matter as this. Have the tooth out at once; the wrench will do you good and prevent any chance of floating pains in the future. Guyon will handle the forceps

with strength and skill, and poor Gordon will think that half his life is gone with the tug. But once over, when he begins to find that the gap is not so enormous as he at first imagined, when he sees people don't notice the alteration in his appearance, he'll begin to think it was a good job that it happened while he was yet young, and he'll settle down and get to work, and perhaps make the name and reputation which his talents, if they had any thing like fair play, entitle him to. It's wonderful the different light in which men see these things. There's my boy there just mad for this girl, raving about her beauty, going into ecstasies about her hair and eyes and figure; and here am I, his chum and intimate, who can safely say that never in the course of a life extending now to some six-and-thirty years, have I had the faintest idea of what being in love is like. Lord, Lord! what a queer world it is! and what is for the best? Perhaps, if I had had nice smooth fair hair instead of a shock-head of bristles, I should have been kneeling at ladies' feet instead of stooping

over my desk, and writing sonnets for girls instead of drawing pleas for attorneys. I know which pays best, but I wonder which is the most interesting. 'Never felt the kiss of love, nor maiden's hand in mine,' eh? Well, I don't know that I'm much the worse for that. Maidens' hands seem to lead one into all sorts of scrapes; and as for the kiss of love— Why, what time's that?"

The striking of the clock on the mantelpiece roused him from his reverie; and looking up, he discovered that his intended five-minutes' absence from work had been extended over two hours, and that the daylight of the late summer time was beginning to fade. So, with a heavy sigh, he lit his reading-lamp and settled down to his desk again. Like every other man accustomed to hard work, he found it immediate relief from thought, and soon became immersed in his writing, at which he slaved away until it was time to get some dinner. He had no heart to walk up to the club that evening. He might meet some fellows of his acquaintance there,—very possibly

Gordon himself; and he was not inclined to chatter upon trivial subjects. So he put on his hat, and strode over to the Cock; the quiet solemnity of the old tavern at that hour of the evening, when the late diners had departed and the early supper-eaters had not yet arrived, being thoroughly congenial to his feelings. After his dinner he went back to his chambers; and after smoking a pipe, during which process he again fell a-thinking over Gordon's trouble, he returned to his work, and was in full swing when he heard a key in the lock, and the next minute Mr. Gordon Frere entered the room.

"Hallo, Gordon!" said Charley, looking up at the clock; "why, it's not eleven; what on earth brings you home so early, young un?"

"Happiness, Charley! jolliness, old fellow! It's all right about to-morrow; Kate's going to the fête, and— After dinner at the Club I went up into the strangers' smoking-room, and there wasn't any one there I knew—only a couple of old fellows, who sat and smoked in silence; and so I got thinking it all over; and what a stunning

girl she is, and how sure I am that she's fond of me, and how fond I am of her—regularly hit, you know; and so I thought it would be horrible somehow to go any where after,—to the theatre, you know, or to hear the fellows chaffing in the way they do about—women and every thing; and so I came home.”

“Just in time to wish me good-night, my boy. I'm off to bed.”

“Not until I've extracted a promise from you, Charley, old fellow.”

“And that is—? Look sharp, Gordon; I'm sleepy.”

“And that is, that you'll come with me to-morrow to the Botanical Fête.”

“To the—to the Botanical Fête! I? Ah, I see, poor Gordon! too much Guyon has made you mad.”

“No, Charley, I'm serious. You know you're my best and dearest friend, the only real friend I have in the world—for my own people are like every body else's own people, full of themselves and not caring one rap for me—and I want

you to see my—to see Miss Guyon, and to give me your real opinion about her.”

“By which, of course, you’ll be thoroughly influenced, and if I won’t approve give her up at once. No, Gordon, I’m not much experienced in these things, but I *do* know enough not to commit myself in the way you suggest. However, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll make half holiday for once, and go with you to the fête—reserving my opinion of the young lady to myself.”

“Well, it’s something to have got you to leave that old desk for an hour, to get you to look at trees and flowers instead of foolscap and red-tape. And as for Miss Guyon—well, you’ll say something about her, I’ve no doubt.”

“I’m not sorry this opportunity offered,” said Charley Yeldham to himself as he was undressing. “I’ve not much curiosity; but I confess I’m anxious to see the girl who has so captivated Master Gordon—partly on her own account, and partly to see if I can trace in her manner any

suspicion of a— No; no woman could be bad enough to lay herself out to entrap a man at her father's desire! And besides, Gordon Frere's not worth snaring!"

CHAPTER VII.

KATHARINE GUYON.

So, three men, all good fellows in their way, and two possessed of qualities not common, and destined to be influenced throughout all their lives by the seeming chance that had made them acquainted with her, were thinking of Katharine Guyon, rather than of any or all their more immediate and important concerns. She had dawned, a new luminary, on their horizon ; and two were conscious worshippers of the bright visible presence, the other had not yet turned his eyes that way. He will do so before long, and then —?

As for Katharine Guyon herself, she had thoughts at present for but one person, and speculations only on one subject. Her warm, impulsive, wholly undisciplined heart had accepted Gordon

Frere as its tenant and ruler, after a sudden fashion, which was not to be defended or excused if judged by the standard of conventionality, or indeed of common-sense. When the latter quality shall be in any one instance admitted into a case of love-at-first-sight, it may advance a claim to invariable acknowledgment; certainly not otherwise. As for conventionality, Katharine in no way bowed to its authority; and it was fortunate indeed that her good taste and innate good-breeding preserved her from any boldness or vulgarity of demeanour; for those were her only safeguards. Legitimate rule over her there was none, and she would not for a moment have brooked usurped authority. Her position was peculiar, and, though there was a good deal of the glitter of fashion and the reality of enjoyment about it, to clear-sighted eyes, looking below the surface, pitiable.

Katharine's mother had brought her husband no advantages in their short, not remarkably happy, marriage, except those attached to an extensive and distinguished family connection. She had no fortune, no possessions of any kind, except

some handsome jewels, which were secured to her, to descend to her children. She lived only a short time; but it is probable she thought the period sufficiently prolonged; for she died, when Katharine was born, with no further expression of regret than that she wished she could have taken the child with her; but was consoled by learning that the physicians thought the feeble infant very unlikely to live. Isabella Stanbourne—for such was the name of Katharine's mother—was a handsome woman, of fine mind and high principles. These qualities had not availed to prevent her making the tremendous though not unusual mistake of a wholly uncongenial marriage; but they did her the questionable service of opening her eyes to the blunder she had committed before she had been Edward Guyon's wife many weeks. Once opened, Mrs. Guyon's eyes were not the sort of optics ever to be even partially closed again; and they perceived and scrutinised every particular of her husband's character and conduct with merciless clearness and vigilance. That gentleman furnished them with ample material for their

scrutiny; and from the close of the honeymoon to the termination of her life Mrs. Guyon held the partner of her existence, whom she knew to be a liar and a profligate, and suspected to be a swindler, in quiet, undemonstrative, but supreme contempt. She was a woman in whom the existence of any kind of regard or even compassion was incompatible with the least feeling of scorn; and so she never tried to persuade herself that she entertained either towards her husband, from the day she found out that the man she had married was a being of a totally different order to the idol which her fancy had set up and worshipped. She did not leave him, even when she made further and more serious discoveries: in the first place, because she disliked the scandal of a separation; in the second, because she was conscious of great delicacy of health, and had a strong presentiment that she should not survive the birth of her child. She determined to give herself the chance, if, contrary to her conviction, she lived; she could then decide upon her future. The chance befriended her, and Mrs. Guyon died. Her last

days were undisturbed by her husband's presence. He had gone to Doncaster when the event which made him a father and a widower took place; and having made rather a good thing of the expedition, he returned to town in very tolerable spirits, and felt that he should now be more interesting and irresistible than ever as a young widower, and could easily get over the inconsolable stage by a trip on the Continent. His dead wife's sister-in-law, the Hon. Mrs. Philip Stanbourne, undertook very gladly to look after the little motherless infant, at whom the elegant Ned barely glanced, during her days of babyhood; and she redeemed her promise well.

It is unnecessary to inquire into the career of Mr. Guyon between the period of Katharine's birth and that of her *debut* in society. It was evident that, however well-founded his anticipations of success, it had not been in the matrimonial direction; and indeed some rather amusing anecdotes were current in society concerning "Ned's" audacious attempts and egregious failures. His wife's relatives had never particularly

admired Mr. Guyon; but they were kindly, unaffected people; and Mrs. Guyon had been strictly and uniformly silent on all her domestic concerns; so that, though they surmised that the brief marriage had not been the altogether ecstatic union Isabella had imagined it would prove, they had nothing but surmise in their minds respecting it; and they never thought of withholding from the motherless girl any of the advantages derivable from their social position and influence. These were far more important to Katharine's father than her guileless uncles, aunts, and cousins imagined—to whom a life of shifts, scheming, and pretence was an utterly unknown and unsuspected possibility—and much more important too to Katharine herself, as regulating her father's conduct towards her, than the girl ever knew or dreamed of. She would probably have been placed economically out of sight, at a foreign boarding-school, and left there to attain the age of womanhood, unnoticed by her father, had not the kind relatives under whose care her early childhood had been happily passed given her

consequence in Mr. Guyon's eyes, causing him to regard her as a valuable possession, a court-card in fact. So, instead of a cheap foreign school being selected as an *oubliette* for the child,—in virtue of whom Mr. Guyon had a seat at the tables of many who were more great than wise,—an expensive establishment for young ladies in the Regent's Park was honoured by Mrs. Stanbourne's choice; and there Katharine was brilliantly, if not solidly educated, the larger portion of the *pension* and her personal expenses being paid by her uncle. In Katharine's early girlhood the Hon. Philip Stanbourne died; and she sustained by this calamity a double loss: not only that of her kind relative and friend, but of her aunt's counsel, training, and protection in the perilous time which lay before her,—the time of early womanhood, and her entrance into society. The widow went abroad with her daughter, who was some years older than Katharine; and though she was in London when the events just related took place, she was not likely to be again a settled resident in England, as her daughter had married

an Austrian nobleman, high in the diplomatic world, and desired to have as much of her mother's society as possible.

The fashionable "establishment" had turned out few girls so well calculated to do it credit and extend its fame as Katharine Guyon, when, at a little more than seventeen, she appeared in a circle of society where, though her father, with all his cleverness and *savoir faire*, received little more than toleration, she at once made a favourable impression. In her appearance she combined the personal attractions of both her parents: she had her mother's high-bred look, her father's vivacity and his fine features; she had the elegant carriage, the delicate hands and feet, the refined voice of Isabella Stanbourne, and the airy easy manner which in Mr. Guyon had a *soupeçon* of impudence. In disposition she resembled her mother exclusively; but there were strong points of difference between them,—difference deepened no doubt by the circumstances of Katharine's girlhood, by the fact that she had never been the object, as her mother had been, of exclusive and conscientious female

care since she had ceased to be a child. She had not the clear, direct, keen perception of her mother; but she was her equal in resolution, and more than her equal in implacability. She was high-spirited now, and impatient of contradiction to a degree that indicated some violence of temper; her feelings were keen and impulsive, and her affections strong and passionate, though undeveloped; for indeed who had the girl to love? She had gone through the ordinary school-girl friendships, and also through the customary flirtations since the former had come to a natural end; but she did not really love any body in the world, except perhaps Mrs. Stanbourne, and of her she had seen but little for some time.

Her feelings towards her father were of a mixed, and, on the whole, of an unsatisfactory character; such as any one watching the girl with anxiety and experience must have recognised with regret. She was fond of him after a fashion, and there was a good deal of *camaraderie* between them; but she had an intuitive distrust of him, and she knew instinctively that all his indul-

gence, all his flattery, all his yielding to her wishes and furnishing her pleasures, were superficial compliances. He liked the kind of life she liked; she knew him well enough, without formally reasoning upon her knowledge, to feel convinced that if their tastes or wishes clashed in any way, *hers* and not *his* would be expected, if not obliged, to yield. She admired her father's pleasant manners and social talents; she had but rarely any opportunity of contrasting his fulfilment of the paternal relation with that of other men; and she was full of youth, health, spirits, and capacity for the enjoyment of every kind of pleasure that offered; so she went her way carelessly and joyously, and reasoned little upon the present or the future. Katharine and her father were not real friends, but they were always technically "good friends;" a result to which the underlying violence of the girl's nature no doubt unconsciously conduced. Mr. Guyon hated trouble and detested scenes; and he had a tolerably correct occult sense that he might find himself "in for" both if he interfered much with Katharine: consequently he did not interfere; and as she was

totally in the dark respecting his pecuniary circumstances, and never asked any troublesome questions, they got on very well together. Real companionship they had none, but they did not miss it; and while her father's chief anxiety about Katharine was that she should make a good match before she "went off" in looks—a good match implying a rich son-in-law, conveniently indifferent about settlements, and ready to "do" bills to any reasonable or unreasonable amount—Katharine's chief anxiety about him was, that he should dye his hair and whiskers with greater success, and drink less wine on evenings when he went to parties with her. She knew he was proud of her beauty, and thought her "doosid good company;" but she did not for a moment imagine he had any sentimental love for her; indeed she fancied he had not much feeling, for he had never mentioned her mother to her in his life. Their relation, in fact, was pleasant, hollow, and heathen; and when Katharine abandoned herself to her new-born love for Gordon Frere, she never thought of her father's feelings or wishes in the

matter, or had a more dutiful notion in her mind than that it "made it pleasant that papa liked his coming about the house." You see she was no exceptional being, no angel alighted for a little on a sphere unworthy of her footsteps and her wings; but an interesting, captivating, self-willed woman, —such as circumstances had made her; a woman whose weaknesses were as visible as her charms, whose strength was latent and unsuspected.

It was not to be supposed that a girl like Katharine—handsome, clever, dashing, and independent in her ideas and manners, of a not precisely-to-be-defined position in society, and with a not-exactly-to-be-commended father — should escape sharp and not kind or altogether candid criticism. She was very much admired; she commanded admiration indeed, however reluctantly accorded; and men liked her very much, even men who were not in love with her, and with whom she did not take the trouble to flirt. Women did not like her; and yet the girl gave them no fair excuse for their prejudice. She was not a determined coquette, conquering and monopolising; she was not rudely

inattentive to women, as "beauties" and "blues" usually are: she was smiling and agreeable, and perfectly indifferent to them all; and, with a host of acquaintances, had but one female friend, her aunt Mrs. Stanbourne. With Lady Henmarsh, who was a distant relative on her father's side, Katharine lived on terms of great intimacy,—the lady was indeed her constant, her official *chaperone*,—but it was an intimacy of the kind which more frequently precludes than includes friendship.

Lady Henmarsh was a woman of the world, in every possible meaning and extent of the term. She was the exact opposite of Mrs. Stanbourne, in manners, mind, tastes, opinions, and principles; and she disliked Mrs. Stanbourne so cordially, that she might have endeavoured to influence Katharine in a contrary direction to that of her wishes, simply to annoy that lady; but she was saved from any thing so unphilosophical by the fact that it suited her in every way to appoint herself high-priestess of Miss Guyon's world-worship. As no one ever saw, and many had never heard of Lady Henmarsh's husband, it was a pardonable

mistake, frequently made by strangers, to suppose that she was a widow. This, however, was not the case. A miserable invalid—whose migrations, if not quite confined to Goldsmith's *itinéraire*, were only from his dull house in Hampshire to his dull house in Cavendish Square; a cross, palsied, querulous old man, called Sir Timothy Henmarsh, who had long since lapsed out of the sight and the memory of society—still existed, not altogether to the displeasure of his lady, who would be seriously impoverished by his death; existed in a condition of illness and suffering which rendered it indispensable that his wife should, in deference to what society calls common decency, provide herself with some further excuse for her neglect of him, and her constant presence at gay and festive scenes of every description, than the real, but unproduceable one, that she liked dissipation and disliked him. Lady Henmarsh and Mr. Guyon had been very good friends indeed in former days, when he was a young widower, thoroughly consoled, and Hetty Lorimer was a pretty portionless girl, who knew that she had nothing to look to but

marriage, and that if she desired to secure the enjoyment of such things as her soul loved, she must take care that it was a "good" one. A marriage with her handsome cousin would have been any thing but one of the required description ; and indeed neither of them ever contemplated such a possibility. They were persons of a discreet and practical turn, and Mr. Guyon went to Hetty Lorimer's wedding (a solemnity at which Sir Timothy Henmarsh's son, a gentleman some years the bride's senior, sternly declined to be present) with perfect alacrity and good humour. They had been excellent friends ever since ; and when, the time having arrived at which Mr. Guyon found it convenient to transfer his daughter from the " establishment" to Queen Anne Street, Lady Henmarsh gave him her advice, and offered him her services with enthusiastic friendship, what more proper and satisfactory arrangement could possibly have been entered into than that Lady Henmarsh should "do the maternal" by Katharine ?

"I've no doubt you'll do it to perfection, Hetty," said Mr. Guyon, as he rose and termin-

ated the interview ; only you won't look the part within a dozen years." And the good-looking deceiver went down the stairs with a smile, which expanded into a grin when he reached the street ; for Miss Hester Lorimer and Miss Isabella Stanbourne had been girls together, and the former was a little older than the lady who had married the irresistible Ned Guyon.

This unexceptionable arrangement had now lasted a considerable time, and no likelihood of its coming to a conclusion by the marriage of Katharine had yet presented itself. Lady Henmarsh was better pleased than Mr. Guyon that it should be so, and less surprised. She understood Katharine better than her father understood her ; she knew how entirely unscathed she had been amid the lightning flashes of real admiration and simulated sentiment which had played around her girlish head ; she knew that in Katharine's perfectly impartial brightness, her frank acceptance of the incense offered before her, her smiling pleasure and indifference, consisted the barrier to Mr. Guyon's wishes. For her part, she was in no hurry about

the matter; indeed, the longer Miss Guyon should require some one (meaning herself) to go about with her, the better pleased she would be. But though Lady Henmarsh did not disquiet herself because Mr. Guyon's wishes remained unfulfilled, she would very seriously and earnestly have disapproved of their being traversed and thwarted. She did not particularly care that Katharine should marry soon, but she fervently desired that she should marry well; and it was with a new and very unpleasant sense of misgiving that she observed the eager and vivacious pleasure which Katharine evinced in the society of Mr. Gordon Frere, and watched the faces and the manner of the two from the alcove, whence she beheld the dancers at Mrs. Pendarvis's ball. Lady Henmarsh knew very little of Gordon Frere; indeed, only one fact, beyond the good looks and the good manners patent to all observers. But in that one fact lay the only important item of knowledge, in the estimation of Lady Henmarsh. Gordon Frere was a poor man, with no income to speak of, and only very desultory, undefined, and contingent

expectations. Clearly this would not meet either Mr. Guyon's views or her own. She hoped, she trusted, nay she believed, that Katharine would not be so infatuated as to think of marrying Frere; she trusted Frere was too much a man of the world to think of marrying Katharine. It was only a flirtation,—it must be only a flirtation; but even that, if she carried it to such an extent as she had done at the ball, Katharine must be induced to give up. It would be remarked, it would keep off other men: of course it was quite foolish to be afraid of any thing serious; so Lady Henmarsh hoped, and trusted, and believed, and yet she doubted and feared. She did not altogether like to acknowledge to herself, perhaps, how little confidence she felt in her own power of “inducing” Katharine to do any thing which did not accord with her own inclination and humour. The tie between them was formed of mutual complaisance, not of influence and respect. Lady Henmarsh did not understand either the strength of Katharine's feelings or the determination of her temper; she had never seen either roused into action, and

she regarded her as rather shrewder and more worldly-minded than most girls, as well as cleverer and better-looking. So, though she knew her to be self-willed, she calculated on her sense and shrewdness overcoming her obstinacy in a matter in which her worldliness would teach her that obstinacy was injurious and misplaced.

Lady Henmarsh pondered these things one fine summer's day, while Katharine rambled about the Botanical Gardens with Gordon Frere and others; while every glance caught from his blue eyes, and every sentence intoned especially for her ear by his earnest musical voice, bound the girl's heart more closely to him, and rendered the task which Lady Henmarsh proposed to herself more difficult of fulfilment, more infructuous in result.

"At all events, it shall not go on like this beyond to-night," said her ladyship to herself: "if she looks at and dances with him as she did at Mrs. Pendarvis's, I shall tell Ned Guyon about it, and find out what he thinks; but my decided opinion is that it is full time *some steps*

were taken." And then she went to visit Sir Timothy.

Mrs. Streightley and her daughter had returned to the Brixton villa, had been affectionately received by Robert, and had heard from him the history of all his doings in their absence. Of course Ellen had allowed the briefest possible space of time to elapse between her return and the despatch of an eager summons entreating Hester Gould to come to her with the least possible delay. Hester arrived about two hours before the ordinary dinner-hour; and the young ladies passed that space of time in the interchange of delightful confidences; complete and heartfelt on the part of Ellen Streightley, and as meagre as might be on that of Hester Gould. All the particulars of Ellen's engagement, which she had already detailed by letter, were again confided to Hester; all the particulars of the visit from which they had just returned, and which had been made to certain relatives of Mrs. Streightley's, of the agricultural persuasion, were once more related in full.

"I used to think Thorswold rather a stupid place, dearest Hester," said Ellen, and a fine blush overspread her pretty honest face: "little did I ever think I should meet my fate there. I do so long for you to see Decimus. You will think him so delightful."

"I shall be very much pleased to see him, Ellen," returned Hester; "and I rejoice, as I am sure you know, in your happiness. But tell me about your brother,—what does he say to it all?"

"Well, indeed, Hester," said Ellen, hesitating and laughing, "that is what I hardly can tell you, he has said so little. He kissed me, and pulled my ear, and called me a little goose, in his own kind way, you know; but he is so taken up with some new friends he has made, I cannot make him out. He looks quite different, I am sure; and is so particular about his dress! A lot of new clothes have just come home from his tailor's, and a whole boxful of lavender-kid gloves. Isn't it funny, Hester? Dear old Robert, he talks a great deal about *Mr.* Guyon; but I suspect he thinks more of *Miss.*

Though indeed I only found out there was a Miss Guyon quite by accident."

Hester Gould's face flushed with sudden anger, and into her calm calculating heart there came a pang of unaccustomed doubt and fear. But it was quite in her ordinary tone she said :

"So your brother's friend is Mr. Guyon, is he? Does he live in Queen Anne Street?"

"Yes, yes; I am sure that is the street I have heard him mention. Stay, there's an invitation stuck in the chimney-glass—here it is. 'Mr. and Miss Guyon request'—and so—yes, '110 Queen Anne Street.' Do you know them, Hester?"

"No, not personally; but I have seen Miss Guyon frequently. I used to teach singing to the Miss Morrisons in the next house, No. 109—it is vacant now, and shut up since Sir Christopher died—and I often saw her going out to ride. She used to go just about at my hour."

"And is she nice, Hester,—is she pretty? Robert never has told me any thing particular about her. Men never can describe any one."

"She is very handsome, very elegant, and very

fashionable," replied Hester; and then she departed from her usual cautious reticence so far as to say, "and I heard the Morrisons say Mr. Guyon was very 'fast,' and lived beyond his means."

"Indeed," said Ellen in a very grave tone, for to her the accusation of living beyond one's means sounded very portentous; "I am sure Robert would not approve of that."

Hester Gould watched Robert Streightley quietly and closely the whole of that evening. She saw him different to any thing he had ever been; preoccupied, absent, but not unhappy. A smile played frequently over his features; and though he sunk into frequent fits of abstraction, they were evidently not painful. He was as kind and affectionate as usual to his mother and sisters, as attentive to herself; but a change had passed upon him which she fully understood. In her cold repressed way, she was bitterly angry.

She went home rather early. As Robert Streightley saw her to the cab, and bade her good-night, she said to herself:

“Daniel Thacker knows this Mr. Guyon,—his sisters may know something about the girl. I’ll go to Hampstead to-morrow; they don’t mind Sunday visitors; and I may have a chance of seeing their brother. Really that girl Ellen grows sillier every day.”

CHAPTER VIII.

AMARYLLIS IN A MARQUEE.

THE prettiest public *fêtes* in London are those given in the gardens of the Botanical Society in the Regent's Park. There is to be found plenty of fresh green turf; there are myriads of lovely flowers blooming in open beds, or tastefully arranged beneath the marquees; there are solemn old big trees stretching out their umbrageous arms, and in their majesty making one think even less favourably than usual of the perky straggling sticks at South Kensington; there are the bands of two or three guards regiments, having sufficient compassion on the visitors to play one after the other, and not, as in some places, at the same time; and there is generally a collection of the nicest-looking people in town. There are few *savans*, and not much literary or artistic talent; but as *savans* and

the professors of literary and artistic talent are for the most part any thing but nice-looking, and as flirtation is the science to which at these gatherings attention is principally devoted, their loss is not felt; indeed it may be safely said that the general company is happier for their absence.

Although the last *fête* of the season is scarcely to be compared to its immediate predecessor, the warm weather of the two preceding days had done very much in contributing to its gaiety on the first occasion when Mr. Charles Yeldham found himself making holiday from his work, and taking part in a grand ceremony of nothing-doing with those whose lives were passed in never doing any thing; and, like most men who rarely emerge from the business of their lives to seek a temporary respite from perpetual work in a few brief hours of enjoyment, Charley was determined to make the most of his time, and to reap the full value of those precious hours which he had grudgingly given up. With his chum leaning on his arm, he made his way through the fruit-tent and the flower-tent, round the American garden,

where the glorious azalias, so lately a mass of magnificent beauty, now stood bare and drooping ; now attracting the attention of a group of faded dowers by his energy and volubility ; anon pausing in rapt attention, listening to the strains of the melody-breathing "Sonnambula," as performed by the Grenadiers, or nodding head and beating hand in sufficiently ill-kept time to a whirlwind gallop rattled through by the band of the Artillery. Into his holiday, as into his work, Charley had thrown his whole heart ; he had determined to shut out temporarily all thoughts of attorneys, pleas, work, and worry, and he went in for the pleasures of the day with an eagerness and an impetuosity that perfectly astonished his companion.

"I'll tell you what it is, Charley," said Gordon Frere, after they had careered round the gardens, and were standing once more by the gate at which they had entered—"I'll tell you what it is ; you're like a country cousin, by Jove ! or one of those horrible fellows that come up to town with a letter of introduction. You want to see every thing, and all at once. It's a deuced good

thing that you don't often give yourself an outing, or you'd be wanting me to take you to the Thames Tunnel, and the Monument, and Madame Tussaud's, and all sorts of wonderful places. Here have we been rushing about from pillar to post, or rather from tent to tent, and from band to band, and you've never yet given me breathing-time to look round and speak to any of the people I know. Now you really must hold on for a moment, for it's just upon three o'clock, and that's the time that Kate—Miss Guyon, I mean—said she should be here; and I promised to be near the entrance, to join her at once."

He spoke with animation, and his bright eyes glowed with fire as he seized his old friend by the shoulders and used a feigned force to arrest his progress. You see Mr. Gordon Frere was brimming over with happiness. To be six-and-twenty years of age; to be good-looking; to have high animal spirits; to have indulgent tradespeople, and a tolerable sufficiency of pocket-money; to be in love with a very charming girl, and to have your passion returned, are all things calculated to make

a man content with life, and disposed to regard human nature from its best point of view. He was pleased to speak of himself as a "creature of impulse," and, by some accident probably, he rightly described himself. Whatever best pleased him for the time being he took up and went in for earnestly and vigorously. He had done so all his life, in cricketering, rowing, riding, at school and college—actually once in reading, when he studied so hard and to so much purpose apparently, that old Mr. Yeldham wrote to Charles, anticipating for his son's chum and his own pupil the highest University honours; but Gordon slacked off, and when the class-list came out, a double-third was all the position awarded him. Up to this time the "impulse" had not been shown very strongly in any love-affairs: he had had his ball-room flirtations, involving bouquet-sending, Rotten-Row riding, Opera-box haunting, &c., as all men have; but he had never—to Charles Yeldham's idea at least—been so really smitten with any one as he announced himself to be with Miss Guyon. So his honest old chum, albeit he had his own views of

the probable reception of Gordon's proposal by Mr. Guyon, could not find it in his heart to check him, and only smiled pleasantly as he said :

“All right, Gordon ; all right, my boy. But you talk of my taking you about here and there, as though I were not a mere child in leading-strings in such a place as this, to be shown each separate sight in the proper order. Now we've seen the fruit and the flowers, and listened to the bands, let us take a look at the people. Tremendous, what you call ‘swells,’ are they not? No end of crinoline, and flowers, and finery. By Jove ! just turn a few of these young ladies to walk through the Temple Gardens, and there would not be much work done that day. Every clerk's nose would be glued to the window ; and I verily believe that even old Farrar, our underneath neighbour, would leave his books and his papers for such a refreshing sight. Now there's one,—look there ! that tall girl just coming in, with—hallo ! steady, young 'un ; what's the matter ?”

Charley Yeldham might well cry “steady ;” for Gordon gave a visible start as he turned in

the direction indicated by his friend; and his tone was thick and hurried as he said, "That's Miss Guyon and her father—and—who the devil's that man with them?"

"Now that's a curious thing," said Yeldham with provoking placidity. "I don't suppose I know another soul in all this large gathering; but I do know that man intimately, and I can tell you who he is. That's Robert Streightley, the City man, that you've so often heard me speak of, and—but what has come to him? Talk of 'swells,' why, I should scarcely have recognised Bob Sobersides, as they used to call him, in that costume. And so that is Miss Guyon, is it? that's Miss Guyon! I say, young 'un, she's—she's wonderfully lovely."

"For God's sake, don't stand staring there with your mouth open, Charley; but let us go up and speak to these people. They've seen us already;" and Mr. Frere, passing his arm through his friend's, led him up to the group, and after making his own salutations, freely presented him to Miss Guyon and her father. Immediately after

his introduction, Yeldham turned and shook hands with Robert Streightley ; and after a few words of astonishment from each at meeting the other in such a place, they commenced a conversation, in which Mr. Guyon took part, leaving Gordon Frere and Katharine walking together a little in advance of them.

There are few things more embarrassing than having something very particular to say, knowing that you will have great difficulty in saying it, and being perfectly convinced that if ever it is to be said at all, the exact time has arrived. This was Gordon Frere's position. He knew that the end of the season had arrived ; that another fortnight would see Miss Guyon flown, with the rest of the fashionable world, to some English sea-board, foreign watering-place, or country-house, whither he could not have the remotest excuse for following her ; he knew the proverbial danger of delay, especially in love-affairs ; he fully shared in Charley Yeldham's only half-expressed doubts as to the reception of his proposal by Mr. Guyon, and in the sudden and unexpected ap-

pearance upon the scene of Robert Streightley—whom he had never met before, but of whom, his wealth, his talents, his City position, he had heard frequently from Charley—he saw a new and important element of danger. If he intended to make his *coup* for the winning of this peerless beauty, now was the time. So he screwed up his courage and began.

“You are a little late, Miss Guyon,”—this in a low, deep, tremulous voice; “you said you would be here at three.”

“You don’t pretend to say that you recollect any thing I said about it, Mr. Frere?” in the same tone. “I scarcely remembered we had touched upon the subject.”

“Don’t you pretend to imagine any such thing so far as I am concerned, Miss Guyon. No, no; pardon me for one instant; you know that whatever concerns you, in however trifling a degree,—and more especially when it relates to the chance of my seeing you,—is always of importance to me.”

He had bent his gaze upon her, as he said

this, and he received a faint fluttering glance as his first reply. Then she said,

“I was scarcely conceited enough to think so, and—and of course I feel the compliment. However, we *have* met, you see.”

“Yes; and so long as that has come about, no matter how late you are; for you see I still hold to my original opinion. However late or early, I must be doubly thankful for the chances of meeting you now. For the season’s at an end, and I suppose you will be off with the rest?”

“I suppose so; though nothing is settled, I believe.”

“And where do you go?”

“Papa talked of Scarborough some time ago. He has not said any thing about it lately; and as I am wholly indifferent on the subject, I’m very good to him, and let him have his own way.”

“Are you similarly complaisant to Mr. Guyon in all things?”

There must have been something special in the tone of his voice; for she looked up quickly with a slight flush, and said,

"In all matters in which I take no particular interest. Where I am concerned I am *exigeante*, and—I am afraid—stubborn."

"Let us call it 'firm,' Miss Guyon," said Frere, with a slight smile. "Firmness is a quality by no means reprehensible, even when exercised towards one's father. It's a horrible thing this break-up of the season, especially as one gets older. All the little pleasant—well, I suppose I may call them friendships—are nipped in the bud until next April, when one has to begin again and struggle on until August, when we find ourselves in exactly the same position in which we were a twelvemonth before."

"That is, unless we take up with a different set of friends," said Katharine; "and I believe there are instances on record of such a change."

Gordon Frere looked at her again, and threw an additional warmth into his voice as he said, "Granted that fidelity is uncommon, Miss Guyon, it should be the more prized when it is found. You are going to-night to Mrs. Tresillian's?"

"Yes; Lady Henmarsh has promised to take

me. It is almost my 'last rose of summer;' positively the last of our ball-engagements this season."

"Let us trust it will be one of the pleasantest. You will come early, and you will give me the first *valse*, and as many afterwards as you can."

"I—I shall be very happy; but we shall leave early. Papa has a holy horror of having his horses kept out late, more especially when he is not present; and he will not be there to-night, I think; for he's going to ask Mr. Streightley to dine with us, and I believe he wants to talk business to him afterwards."

"Mr. Streightley going to dine with you! By the way, who is Mr. Streightley?"

"Mr. Streightley? he's a horror—I didn't mean that. He's a City friend of papa's, and, as I'm told, a very rich man."

"Very rich, and in the City, eh!" said Gordon Frere, looking over his shoulder at the object of their remark. "He's better got up than most of his genus. I think I could swear to Poole in his

coat. Very rich, and you've been told so, Miss Guyon ! He's a lucky man."

"Is he, Mr. Frere ? You'll excuse my saying that I don't follow you ; that I don't know why Mr. Streightley is lucky."

"Did you not yourself say that he was very rich, Miss Guyon, and that you had been told so ?" said Gordon, with more warmth than he had previously exhibited. "Society acts as this gentleman's *avant-coureur*, and repeats his claim to respect wherever he goes ; and of course he finds people prepared to proffer him ready-made honour."

The bitterness in his tone jarred on Kate's ear. His face was averted, so that there was no need for her to restrain the half-inquiring, half-loving gaze with which she looked up at him as she said,

"I never knew you cynical before, Mr. Frere, and I don't think the mood becomes you. Surely the notion that wealth is the most desirable of all possessions is utterly exploded. For my own part, I think that riches in a man—I mean when

they are so great as to be talked about—are something against him; something to be got over, like his being black, or having a hump-back.”

“This is a very refreshing doctrine, Miss Guyon; but I’m afraid it has not many disciples; and even you would lean to the side of the modest competence and—”

“I would lean to nothing; I would give way to nothing so palpably sordid and base.”

“You are strangely in earnest on this point, Miss Guyon.”

“I am thoroughly in earnest about it; and I—”

“You cannot tell with what delight I hear it, Miss Guyon. I—you have removed a certain distrust which has prevented me from—”

“As you say”—broke in the strident voice of Mr. Guyon, as he with Streightley and Yeldham “formed up in line”—“In a formal dinner-party you may sit side by side with people and never know any more about them than if they were at opposite ends of the table. You’re quite right, Streightley, quite right. But to-night we’re quite

alone. Katharine, my dear, Mr. Streightley has promised to take us as he finds us, and come home to dinner to-day."

Miss Guyon bowed, and murmured her delight. Then said *sotto voce*, "It is Mrs. Tresilian's night, papa, you recollect; and Lady Henmarsh is coming to fetch me."

"O yes, my dear; of course, of course. Lady Henmarsh coming, eh! But that won't make any difference."

"No, papa; only you won't mind my running away."

"Of course not, my dear; of course not. And how is my young friend Gordon Frere? Blooming as usual. No need to ask that. Give your arm to an old boy, Gordon; and trot him round, and show him all the—the beauty of the day."

Gordon, who was eminently disgusted at the interruption of his conversation with Kate, and who was showing his feelings in his knitted brow and puckered mouth, had any hopes of a further *causerie* which he might have entertained dashed to the ground by Mr. Guyon, who passed his deli-

cate lavender-glove through his young friend's arm and led him off in triumph, while Streightley and Yeldham followed on either side of Miss Guyon.

Few men could make themselves pleasanter companions than Ned Guyon when he was so inclined. He had not merely a capital flow of animal spirits, a store of what in women is called small-talk, but what in men may better be described as broad talk, a keen perception of the ludicrous, and a sufficient power of satire, but he had the great knack—learned in his long experience of life—of exactly suiting his conversation to his audience. He possessed in perfection the slang of the clubs, which nowadays passes current for what is called “swell talk,” and which is not merely a peculiar *argot* with special words meaning special things, with excised pronouns and abbreviated nouns, but which, to be perfect, must be spoken in a voice specially pitched for the purpose. The voice and the language none had studied better than Guyon; there were few men of his age, indeed, who had taken the trouble to

master either; but in the fashionable sinner's worldly experience he had found the greatest profit in keeping himself *au courant* with the ways and manners of men of the rising generation. Once let any of them perceive that he was a fogey, in the least antiquated in his ideas or pursuits, and all hope of influence over them was gone; but so long as he could take a leading part in their follies, and blend undoubted past experience with apparent present enjoyment, their houses, horses, purses were at his disposal; and it was considered rather an honour among the subalterns of the Rag or the Plungers from Aldershott to have dropped their money at *écarté* or *baccarat* to such a cool clever hand as Mr. Guyon.

Perhaps the old diplomatist had never been in better force than on the present occasion, although there was apparently little opportunity for the exercise of his powers. Frere, *distracted*, if not savage, at starting, found himself first listening to his companion's remarks; then laughing at his stories; finally answering him, and leading him on to further banter. With a fair proportion of the

company present Mr. Guyon had some acquaintance, and of nearly every body who was any body he had some racy anecdote to whisper laughingly into his companion's ear. It did not strike Frere until long afterwards that all these piquant stories were indebted for their piquancy to a half-sneering cynicism, a half-avowed libertinism ; that in all the broad principles of honour were ridiculed, and the scampish shifts of so-called "galantry" exalted ; that the whole conversation, in fact, was such as might have been expected from a *blasé* youth or a battered rake, but scarcely to be looked for in a gentleman whose marriageable daughter was walking within a few feet of him.

They remained in the gardens until past six o'clock, promenading, visiting the tents, stopping to speak to friends ; but never on any occasion had Gordon Frere another chance of approaching Miss Guyon. He made several attempts ; but invariably her father had something to say to her—or to him—and cut in between them with the pleasantest smile and the cheeriest remarks possible. It was not until just as they were get-

ting into the carriage that Mr. Guyon suddenly turned aside, and saying, "Ah, by the way!" took out a card, wrote on it in pencil, in his airiest manner borrowed an envelope from the ticket-taker standing at his desk in the entrance, and despatched it by a commissionaire who was in waiting. In that short interval Gordon Frere managed to slip round to Miss Guyon's side and whisper, "The first valse, to-night?" and to receive in reply an almost imperceptible acquiescence in the glance of her eyes and the bending of her head. Then Mr. Guyon, wheeling round, took a very affectionate leave of Gordon, and made a polite bow to Charles Yeldham, handed his daughter into the carriage, motioned to Streightley to follow her; and finally jumping lightly in himself, they were whirled off, with much door-slamming and horse-pawing.

The concluding episode of the little drama in which he had asserted his position with Miss Guyon had reanimated Gordon Frere, and rendered him happy and amiable. "Such a lord is Love, and Beauty such a mistress of the world."

So he turned cheerily to Yeldham, on whom he had not bestowed so much as a glance or a thought for the past two hours, and gripping his arm, said :

“ Well, old boy, and what do you think of her ?”

Mr. Charles Yeldham was seldom absent or preoccupied : he was far too practical for that. But on the present occasion his thoughts must have been engaged, for he started, with something like a flush on his cheeks, as he said :

“ Who ? what, Gordon ? I wasn’t attending, I fear.”

“ I was asking you what you thought of Miss Guyon, Charley ?”

“ She is wonderfully beautiful.”

“ Well said, old fellow. Quite enthusiastic, by Jove !—for you, at all events. But what I mean is, seriously, is not she something to be proud of ; something different from the ruck of grinning, simpering, yea-nay girls one meets about—in such places as that we’ve just left, for instance ?”

“She is, indeed.”

“I hope you talked to her. Not that I think—no offence to you, old fellow—not that perhaps your talk would be exactly suited to her—too deep, you know, and all that kind of thing—but still you would be able to make out that she had a head on her shoulders. Doesn’t she talk well?”

“Well, to tell truth, I had not much opportunity of judging, for she remained tolerably silent; and the conversation—such as it was—was between Robert Streightley and myself.”

“O, by the way, that fellow Streightley,—I’ve heard you speak of him. Who is he, and what’s all about him? What the deuce did old Guyon bring him here for? and why has he gone home with them to dinner?”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Charles Yeldham. “‘Beware, my lord, of jealousy!’ Here’s an Othello for you! I don’t think, Gordon, you need look with much suspicion on Robert Streightley, unless you’ve fixed your affections on good investments or early information; and then you would stand

no chance with him, I can tell you. But he's been too long engaged to Capel Court to waver in his allegiance."

"But what on earth brought him here?"

"What? Who? you should ask, and I would answer, your intended father-in-law. There's no man with a clearer head for business: what will be more explanatory, I will say there's no man better able to put a friend on to 'a good thing' than Streightley; and I fancy Mr. Guyon would not be above a little staggering if he could act on Streightley's information."

"But people don't get City information or talk to each other on what you call 'staggering' topics at Botanical Fêtes. Why did he bring him here?"

"O impetuous youth, 'still harping on my daughter!' don't you see that there must be a *quid pro quo*? If Mr. Streightley is to assist Mr. Guyon, why should not Mr. Guyon show Mr. Streightley the elevated position which he holds, the society in which he moves?"

"Yes, that's all very well; but I say, Charley,

Streightley don't know Mrs. Tresillian, does he?"

"Who's Mrs. Tresillian?"

"The wife of the member for Penmouth; people who live at Rutland Gate, and entertain perpetually. He's not likely to be going there to-night, this Streightley, is he?"

"No more than he's likely to be going to Kamschatka; not so likely. Why?"

"O, nothing; only Miss Guyon is going there—and so am I."

"Is Miss Guyon going? Ah, well, I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

And during their ride to chambers in the hansom, both men were singularly silent.

Mr. Streightley had plenty of time to make himself acquainted with the features of the private friends and the public celebrities who were enshrined in Miss Guyon's photographic album; with the views of the Rhine and the Moselle; with the cards of callers "lurking within the bowl;" with the tastefully-arranged flowers and their elegant

basket; with the paper-knife, like a golden dagger; with Gustave Doré's latest sketches; and with all the innumerable nicknacks of a lady's table. Miss Guyon had gone straight to her room; and Mr. Guyon, begging to be excused, as he had a few little matters of business, had retired into what he called his "study,"—a very gloomy little den behind the dining-room, furnished with a battered leather writing-table, a cane-bottomed chair, a grim bust of a deceased friend powdered with "blacks," a boot-jack, a clothes-brush, a glass-case of stuffed birds, and the Court Guide for 1850. Streightley had been shown, at Mr. Guyon's suggestion, into a spare bedroom, where he had performed a brief toilet, and then mooned about the drawing-room, occupying himself in the manner just described. Mr. Guyon was the first to break in on his solitude; and shortly afterwards Miss Guyon entered the room, looking so lovely that Robert Streightley remained spell-bound, and could not take his eyes from her. She wore a pale mauve-silk dress, with soft *tulle* half-way over it, looped up with real Cape jasmine, a tiny

bouquet of the same flower in her bosom ; and her hair gave her a certain air of peculiarity, and shed around her a subtle and intoxicating perfume. Round her neck she wore a string of pearls with a diamond clasp ; and the same on each arm completed her jewelry. Looking at her, Robert Streightley seemed to lose his identity, and to become part and portion of some fairy story which he had read, some picture of *moyen-âge* pageant which he had seen. Women ? Yes, he had known women before—his mother, Ellen, Hester Gould. What had they in common with this soft, delicate, queenly creature, the touch of whose hand on his arm thrilled him to the bone, the sound of whose voice sent the blood rushing to his heart, the glance of whose eye—light, fleeting, and uninterested though it was—he would have purchased at the price of a king's ransom.

The dinner was good, and Mr. Guyon was gay ; but neither succulent dishes nor brilliant sallies had much effect on Robert Streightley. They were scarcely seated before he learned, from a chance observation uttered by Miss Guyon, that

she was going to Mrs. Tresillian's ball; and the knowledge that Gordon Frere would probably meet her there—a fact which he divined intuitively—weighed heavily on Streightley's mind. He tried to exert himself to respond to his host; he tried to talk lightly and pleasantly to Kate, who seemed in the highest spirits, but all unsuccessfully. Whenever there was a lull in the conversation, he fancied her in Frere's arms being whirled round the room, or listening to his low voice with such a pleased expression on her face as he had seen there that night in the Opera-box. Those bright eyes, that flow of spirits, that general happiness, which even prompted her to be far more agreeable to him and far more recognisant of his presence than she had yet ever deigned to be, were not they all due to the fact that she was going to meet his—well, why not?—his rival? As he was thinking thus the servant entered the room bearing a letter, which Miss Guyon read, opened, and flung on the table with an air of vexation, that contrasted strongly with her recent good-temper.

"It's too bad!" she cried in a petulant voice;
"too bad! and I don't believe a word of it."

"What's the matter, Kate, my child!" asked
Mr. Guyon in his blandest tones.

"After dressing myself, and setting my heart
upon it—the last ball of the season too—it's—it's
most horribly annoying!" and Miss Guyon bit her
lip very hard, and threw back her head to stop
her tears.

"My dear Kate," said Mr. Guyon, looking
like a modern edition of Lucius Junius Brutus,
"you seem to forget that, besides your father,
there is present a gentleman who—no, pardon me,
my dear Streightley, allow me to speak—who
should be—hem!—thought of. *What*—if I may
again be allowed to put the question,—*what* is
there in that note that can have so very much
discomposed you?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Streightley—I—but
it is so annoying! Here's Lady Henmarsh, papa,
writes to say she cannot go to Mrs. Tresillian's
to-night. She's got one of her headaches—those
horrible headaches that I don't believe in one bit

—and she knows I was looking forward to her taking me, and that it will be impossible for me to go without her. *It is so vexing!*”

Mr. Guyon was about firing off an elaborate remark; but hearing Streightley commencing to speak, he stopped himself, and waved his hand towards his friend.

“I was—eh, you’re very kind—no, I was only going to say,” said Streightley, with a hesitation which was quite strange to him, “that I’m sure I sympathise with you, Miss Guyon—sympathise with you thoroughly. It is very annoying to be balked in any thing that we’ve—set our minds on, as I may say. But what I was going to say was—I don’t know about these kind of things, of course, as you know, Mr. Guyon, and no doubt you too, Miss Guyon; but could not your papa, Miss Guyon,—could not your papa be your escort to this ball?”

It was a really grateful glance that Kate shot at him as she said, “O, thank you so very much for the suggestion, Mr. Streightley. Of course he could. Papa, do you hear?”

"I do, my dear. I hear Mr. Streightley's suggestion, which is exactly in accord with that—that—high-mindedness and—and suggestiveness for which I've always given him credit. But unfortunately it's impossible, Kate; perfectly impossible to-night. I have some documents in there," jerking his head towards the den behind, "the perusal of which will occupy me until—ah, day-break."

Miss Guyon said not another word, but rose from the table as her father ceased speaking. She wished Mr. Streightley "good-night," and after a moment's hesitation gave him her hand; she kissed Mr. Guyon's forehead—the little space which was not covered with his carefully-poodled hair—with her lips, and left the room. But as she passed the glass, Streightley caught a glimpse of the reflection of her face, and saw that every nerve in it was quivering with repressed passion. He knew the reason well enough, and it did not tend to raise his already-drooping spirits; so he shortly afterwards took his leave and went home, where he found his sister Ellen waiting up for him

to tell him that Hester Gould had been spending the evening with her, having previously been to the Botanical Fête, where she had seen the beautiful Miss Guyon.

“And you were walking with her, Hester says, Robert,” said Miss Ellen; “she saw you, though you didn’t see her. How I should like to see her, Robert! Now tell me all about her. Is she so beautiful? and is she going to be married?”

“My dear child,” said Robert in rather a harsh tone, “do you imagine I tell you the names of a tithe of the people I know in business? Mr. Guyon is a business acquaintance of mine; and I have been introduced to his daughter. So far as I am a judge, she is very beautiful; but really though I have seen her a few times, she has not yet confided to me whether she is going to be married or not.”

On the receipt of which short answer, Miss Ellen Streightley, telling her brother “he need not snap her head off,” handed him his candle and went to bed.

Mr. Guyon had said that the "perusal" of certain "documents" would occupy him until day-break; but long before the first faint thread of dawn appeared in the eastern sky that gentleman was sleeping the sleep of the just, having immediately after Streightley's departure slipped down to his Club, and returned lighter in heart and heavier in purse after playing a few rubbers with consummate skill and great luck. But gleaming on certain characters in this veracious history, the first rays of the rising sun found them defiant of sleep, if not actively engaged. Found Katharine Guyon with her dark hair streaming over her pillow, bedewed with tears of rage and disappointment, and her eyes, under their swollen lids, bright and staring; found Robert Streightley, racked with sharp pangs of jealousy and doubt, vainly courting repose; found Gordon Frere lounging homeward up Piccadilly, his hands plunged in his trousers-pockets, his opera-hat hanging listlessly on the back of his head, a cigar in his mouth, and a faded flower in his coat, chafing bitterly against the absence of his heart's idol from Mrs.

Tresillian's ball, and at the postponement of the love-avowal which he had determined to make; finally, found Charles Yeldham, bright, fresh, and glowing from his morning bath, just settling down to his desk, with his mind filled partly with thoughts of the work he was about to commence, partly with reminiscences of a queenly figure, a stately walk, and a bright pair of eyes, seen yesterday for the first time.

CHAPTER IX.

INVESTMENTS.

IT was seldom that Robert Streightley allowed himself the luxury of thought. He was so much in the habit of deciding, after a rapid business calculation, upon any thing that was submitted to him, of accepting or rejecting the proposition at once, that he scarcely knew what it was to ponder, and weigh, and calculate chances. In his business he had never, apparently, had occasion to calculate them. The knowledge which guided him seemed to come to him intuitively, and hitherto had scarcely ever failed in producing a good result. But in these recent days he had proposed to himself a venture such as he had never previously contemplated, a risk which was a risk indeed, a prize for which he should have to enter against sharp competition, and which, even if he

gained it, he yet felt would be uncertain and difficult to deal with. It was a troublous time for this honest, straightforward, simple man of business, who for the first time in his life found himself possessed by a mania over which he had not the least control; this long-headed, cool, calculating fellow, who was accustomed to look far ahead, and see clearly what would be the end of any step he proposed to take before he took it, and who now found himself irresistibly impelled to rush blindly on, ignoring consequences, content to leave all to Fate, and to console himself with the victory of the moment. Never before during his career had he felt the smallest pang of jealousy; never before, when bidding for great contracts, involving such an amount of capital as made the boldest hesitate before speculating, had he, after a few minutes' rapid calculation, wavered for an instant. But the present case was different: it was "the house" then; it was "the heart" now. Luck, carefully steered by prudence and by foresight, and acumen more than prudence, had brought his ventures safely riding over the billows, and

through the shoals and shallows; would it do so now?

He was desperately in love with this girl—this bright, brilliant, haughty, wilful girl. Even in all the mad fervour of his passion he allowed to himself that she was haughty and wilful, and he loved her all the more,—loved her with a depth and earnestness, with a wild passionate longing such as he had never believed he could have felt. Haughty and wilful! were not these very qualities great ingredients in her charm? Had he not for nearly forty years been living with the tame and commonplace women among whom his lot had been cast, and had any of them ever had the slightest influence over him? had they ever caused his heart one extra vibration—his pulse one extra throb? Why should he not enter the lists and tilt amongst the others for the hand of this Queen of Beauty, who sat smiling so superciliously in the balcony? It was an open course, and he brought amongst his attributes a stout heart and a willing hand to the encounter. In curvettings and caracoles, and all the dainty manœuvres of

the *manège*, in courtly skill and trick of fence, there might be his superiors; but when the issue of the combat came to sheer hard fighting, where courage and persistency won the day, he would give way to none. And, carelessly fluttering over the leaves of his ledger, as in his dim City office he revolved all these thoughts within his mind, he felt—not without a blush of shame—that he had secured the services of a most potent ally within the citadel. In these portentous leaves the name of Edward Guyon, Esquire, of Queen-Anne Street, now had a small space reserved to itself, the details covering which, though insignificant in such a business as that of Streightley and Son, were multiplied amazingly since the first “transaction” which had brought the siren to the abode of Plutus. Over Robert Streightley Mr. Guyon had obtained an extraordinary influence; due, let it be stated, of course to a certain extent to the young merchant’s infatuation, but also in a great degree to his own admirable tact. During the course of a life passed in business Robert had seen many specimens of *tracasserie* and humbug, which his good

nurse had enabled him to estimate at their real value; but he had never been brought in contact with any of their professors who had, or seemed to have, the real charm of social influence. In Mr. Guyon's society—and of late he had been admitted into a great deal of Mr. Guyon's society—Robert Streightley seemed to feel himself a different being. There was nothing rough or unpleasant in his new friend and those to whom his new friend introduced him; he became for the first time in his life aware of the existence of another world, where well-bred ease, polished manners, and refined conversation were substituted for that eternal strife and fight and wrangle for money-getting in which his whole previous existence had been passed.

And she—Katharine—his adoration—she was of this world, and yet not of it so much as she might be; held not that queenly position in it which she might hold, were circumstances different. It would have taken a mind much less acute than Robert Streightley's to perceive at once the influence which the possession of wealth had

among those who affected to despise it. In an instant he saw—few so rapidly—how many of the new society into which he had been introduced, while merely electro-plated and veneered, were endeavouring to pass themselves off as the genuine article; and he ascribed, correctly enough, the sneers at money, in which most members of the society indulged, to their lack of it. Why should he not be the means of giving her the position which she would so thoroughly adorn? She looked a duchess; why should he not give her the power of gratifying the tastes of a duchess? Robert Streightley, constantly engaged in the accumulation of money, had given very little thought to the amount that he had accumulated. Confident in the security of his investments, he left the heap to gather in rolling; his simple life and the even more simple life led by his mother and sister in the Brixton villa were provided for at a comparatively infinitesimal cost; and of the bulk of his possessions he had taken little heed, knowing that it was there “to the good.” But recently, within the last few days, he had looked through his accounts, and found that

he was the possessor of what would be considered, even in "the City," to be a large fortune. Money he had in funds, and stocks, and securities of all kinds; money in ships bound on antipodean voyages, and in semi-cleared Canadian forests; money in loans to Egyptian viceroys and Nicaraguan republics; money in an English estate, "all that house and estate known as 'Middlemeads,' in the county of Bucks, with five hundred acres of park-like land, well-preserved coverts, lake with fishing-temple, large stabling, forcing-houses, hothouses, orangery, delightfully situate on the brow of Holcomb Hill, with the silver Thames winding in the distance," as it was described in the auctioneer's advertisement. The auctioneer, whose descriptive powers are here recorded, had not the opportunity of bringing this "lot" to the hammer; for finding the previous bidding dull, Robert Streightley, to whom the estate had reverted on the foreclosure of a mortgage which he held upon it, determined to withdraw it from public competition, wisely thinking that he could sell it a better bargain to some private purchaser. When the bold idea of asking

for Miss Guyon's hand first entered his head, the recollection of this property flashed upon him at once. He had never seen the place, but he knew from his agent that it was essentially a gentleman's house, and that the entire estate was large, productive, and one of which any one might be proud. "Mrs. Streightley of Middlemeads;" "Middlemeads, August;" "Mrs. R. Streightley presents"—Robert Streightley found himself sketching these words on his blotting-pad as these thoughts passed through his mind; and though he gave a short laugh of semi-contempt at the wildness of his fancy, the idea had so far possessed him, that he wrote off to his old friend and legal adviser Charles Yeldham, begging him to be at the Great-Western station at a given hour on the next morning, and go with him to see a place down the line which he had purchased as an investment.

At the appointed time Mr. Streightley walked on to the platform, and found his friend already awaiting him. Mr. Charles Yeldham was indeed instantly recognisable. In all the crowd of pushing anxious passengers he stood perfectly calm and

self-possessed, heeding neither the porters wheeling heavy barrows, who shouted to him "By your leave!" and charged straight at him with the obvious intention of grinding him to powder; the grooms, vainly endeavouring to hold their braces of pointers, which invariably came to grief through disinclination to go the same side of the columns supporting the roof; the helpless female, or the excited male passengers. There were men in every variety of travelling-dress, in wide-awakes, and pork-pie hats, and cloth caps, and fezzes; in suits of dittoes in every conceivable variety of check, in knickerbockers and gaiters, in tightly-fitting 'horsy' trousers, and wearing couriers' bags or slung race-glasses. But among them placidly walked Charles Yeldham, in his broadish-brimmed chimney-pot, his high-buttoning black waistcoat, his Oxford-mixture trousers very baggy at the knees, and his Wellington boots—among them, but not of them—with a pleasant smile on his cheery face, and with his head full of the case of Marshland *versus* the Bagglehole Improvement Company, the pleadings in which he had to draw.

But he saw Streightley at once, and as he caught sight of him he again noticed the change in his friend's style of dress, which he had not thought of since their meeting at the Botanical Gardens, and laughed quietly to himself.

"This is good, Yeldham; I knew you would come," said Streightley, as the train moved out of the station. "You're just the man I want for a sound practical opinion."

"On an estate which you've bought, Robert? Yes; my knowledge of the value of land, derived from occasionally looking out on to and running round the Temple Gardens; the quick eye with which, from constant practice, I shall be able to detect any shortcomings in the building, and suggest improvements; my general acquaintance with farming-stock and agricultural produce, will enable me to give you some very valuable advice."

"You're laughing at me, old friend; but it don't much matter; and I know of old that you always will have your joke. No; it was not exactly on these points that I wanted to consult you, —in fact, not at all upon them. With all your

pretended ignorance, you are a country-bred man, and one able to give a thoroughly practical opinion on the value of Middlemeads and its capabilities ; and moreover, by this means I get you out quietly into the air and away from these stivy chambers, and have the opportunity of a long quiet talk with you about—about any subject that may turn up, without the risk of your being worried by perpetual visits of attorneys' clerks, or the annoyance of seeing you constantly fidgetting to get to your desk again and get to work at something else."

"O ho, Master Robert! then this is a trap, is it? a kind of perforce holiday into which you have led me?"

"Not at all. Wait until the day is over, until I've said all I've got to say, and you've heard it, before you complain. And even if it were—supposing it were a holiday, you don't take so many of them that you need grudge yourself this outing."

"So far as that goes we're both in the same boat, I think ; but I have had a holiday, and only

a couple of days ago, when I was at the Botanical—Why, by Jove! you were there too.”

“Of course I was. That *is* good! our each giving the other credit for constant industry, and then recollecting that we had lapsed into idleness together. By the way, that Mr. Frere—who lives with you, doesn’t he?—what sort of fellow is he?”

“A capital fellow,” said honest old Charley Yeldham; “a good deal younger than we are, you know, Robert, and consequently more impulsive, and what he would call ‘gushing’—and yet older in some respects too; older in cynicism and so-called knowledge of life, and—; but a very good fellow, a capital youngster. I’ve known him since he was a boy. He was a pupil of my father’s.”

“O, indeed! Has he—has he been very long intimate with Mr. Guyon’s family, do you know?”

“No, not very long, I should say. By the way, I did not know until I met you with him that you knew Mr. Guyon, Robert.”

“Didn’t you? O yes; a business acquaintance of mine.”

"Business acquaintance? Hem! I can understand Mr. Guyon's popularity from a social point of view, but in matters of business I confess I think that—"

"Don't you fear, dear old Charley; I know all about that; and—and does Frere go often to the Guyons'?"

"N-no; not very often, I think. He's been once or twice lately; but he's not likely to see much more of them this season, as he's gone out of town—down to his father's—on a matter of business. What do you think of Miss Guyon?"

"She is very handsome—at least I suppose so; I'm not much of a judge in those matters. And how are we getting on with Hamilton's action?"

Upon which question the gentlemen plunged into a conversation full of business details, which occupied them until they arrived at their station, where alighting, they hired a trap and drove over to Middlemeads.

Passing through a little village, and turning sharply to the right after sighting the old church, they came upon a quaint one-storied stone lodge.

Standing out from the ivy, in which it otherwise was buried, stood a sculptured knight in full armour treading on a serpent, the well-known crest of the Chevers of Middlemeads, the glorious old family whose ancestral seat had passed to strangers, and whose last scion was now dwelling in a little cottage at Capécure near Boulogne. A few short words of explanation to the old portress gained them admission, and they entered a long drive leading through groves of noble trees and over undulating ground—where the deer, half hidden in the deep fern, were quietly feeding—to the house. Then under the principal gateway with its long range of gables and unrelieved wall, through the double arch in the first court, which was carpeted with greensward, to the second or paved court, fronted with its pure Ionic colonnade, where the old housekeeper, already apprised of their coming, was in readiness to receive them. Charles Yeldham's heart, albeit somewhat incrustated with legal formulæ and a long course of Doe and Roe, yet filled with reverence for antiquity and appreciation of architectural beauty, thrilled within him as, pre-

ceded by the old housekeeper, they walked through the great hall, now denuded of its glorious family pictures, its Holbeins and Lelys, its Jansens and Knellers, its grand Vandyke, its "Animals reposing" by Snyders, and its "Riding-party" by Wouvermans—all long since dispersed at the hands of Christie and Manson, but still retaining its fireplace with the ornamental fire-dogs bearing the arms and initials H. A. of Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn, royal guests of the Chevers in the good old days. Through the Brown Gallery and Lady Betty Chiddingstone's chamber, through the Spangled Bedroom, and the King's Room, where James I. had passed a night, through the Organ Room, where still stood the ancient instrument which had been used for divine service in connection with the adjoining chapel, long since dismantled and half in ruins, they passed; and in each the old cicerone poured forth her oft-told tale of bygone glories.

While in each of these rooms, Yeldham indulged in retrospect, peopling them according to his fancy with those who might have inhabited

them, picturing to himself how the stately lords and ladies lived and moved and had their being; and smiled half-cynically to himself in the thought that, other differences allowed, they were doubtless swayed by the same passions, victims of the same hopes and fears and doubts, moved by the same temptations, and acted on by the same impulses as we of these degenerate days. He was surprised to find that his companion was going through the house in the most practical manner, apportioning the rooms one by one to their several purposes, deciding upon the Brown Gallery for a drawing-room, the King's Chamber for the principal bedroom, planning the furniture and fittings for the great hall, and altogether comporting himself as though he were the head of a large family come down to make the necessary arrangements for its immediate induction. This notion struck him at first comically, but when he saw it persevered in in every detail, he began to think more seriously of it; and after they had left the house, and were again in the trap driving back to the station, he turned to his friend and said,

"Why, Robert, what on earth is in your head now? I've been perfectly astonished in watching you ever since we entered Middlemeads."

"Have you? In what way have I excited your astonishment? Did I swagger too much about my purchase? did I what they call 'gush' about my place?"

"Not a bit; and if you had, there would have been every excuse for you. A more delightful old house and more perfect grounds never were seen."

"Well, then, what did I do?"

"Well, it seemed to me that you didn't regard the place from a bachelor point of view. You were planning drawing-rooms, and bedrooms, and dining-halls, and—"

"You know that my mother and sister form part of my belongings?"

"Ye-es; but I didn't hear any mention of your mother and sister, and—"

"Speak plainly, Charley, and say that you think I contemplate matrimony."

"And suppose I were to say so?"

“Suppose you were? Well, then, all I could say would be—that I felt myself a sneak for not having owned the fact before to you, my dear old friend. But in any thing out of my regular routine of business I’m as shy as a great school-girl; and I could not bring myself to tell even you about it.”

“Then it’s a case, Robert. A case at last with you, of all men in the world. I feel now that even I myself am not impregnable, after ‘Bob Sobersides’ has surrendered at discretion.”

“Chat away, old fellow. I’ve no reply to make, save that the opposing force was irresistible—as I think you’ll allow.”

“My dear Streightley, I hope I’m a true friend, but I don’t think you could have a worse confidant in an affair of this kind, so far as giving any opinion on an unknown young lady is concerned—”

“But suppose the young lady is not unknown to you?”

“Not unknown to me! Well, that alters the case of course. But, God bless my soul, who

can—who can have won your love in this sudden way, Robert? You're not a man of impulse; you're accustomed to think deeply, and weigh and balance before committing yourself—you would not do any thing rash. Who on earth can it be?"

"I'm a bad hand at concealing any thing of this sort," said Streightley with a half-rueful smile. "Indeed, I think I must seem awkward about the whole business; but the truth of it is, old friend—I'm madly in love with Miss Guyon, and I hope to make her my wife."

"Miss Guyon?"

"Ay, Miss Guyon. It has not been a long acquaintance, I know; but I believe those things never are—I mean that—you know what I mean. But you know her; at least you've seen her, and—that must be my excuse for the rashness, and the folly, and whatever the world chooses to call it. For she is very lovely, isn't she, Charley?"

"Very lovely, indeed!" said Yeldham.

And then, as though by a tacit understanding, both men leaned back in the carriage, and

delivered themselves up to their own reflections.

Needless to say what were Robert Streightley's. Vague desires to call up well-remembered expressions of Katharine's face, which yet refused to be recalled at the moment; dim distrusts and doubts of his own chance of winning her hand; soul-disturbing thoughts of her friendship with Gordon Frere; wild plots of laying Mr. Guyon under even greater obligations to him, and thus making sure of his alliance and support; dreamy reminiscences of how she had looked and moved, and what she had done and said on the several occasions when he had seen her.

Charles Yeldham's thoughts were of a very different kind. Here was this simple girl, of whose existence he had scarcely known a few days ago, now exercising influence over the future fate of three—no, of two men: as for himself—bah! the chambers and the pleadings, the hard work which was to make up little Clare's dowry,—that was his fate, and there was an end of it so far as he was concerned. But Gordon?

Poor Gordon, who had gone off full of life and hope to urge upon his father the necessity of "doing something for him," actuated thereto solely by the hope of propitiating Mr. Guyon by being able to show himself in a position to ask for Katharine's hand ; poor Gordon, who was at that moment doubtless promising and vowing all sorts of things in his own name to his father, and who, if he succeeded in getting promise of an appointment, would write off triumphantly in prosecution of his suit, or who, if he failed, would come back to town and try and pursue it without the necessary qualification, but who in either case would have a cold shoulder turned upon him and the door shut in his face so soon as a suitor of Streightley's calibre was known to have entered the lists. "I hope to make her my wife." Those were Robert Streightley's words ; and from them Yeldham could not gather whether or not the final question had been asked ; but be that as it might, he knew sufficiently of Mr. Guyon to feel certain that Gordon's hopes were destined to suffer utter

wreck. Would not the girl herself be true to the—to the what? What could this poor lad adduce in support of the flame which he had nourished but the ordinary flirtation-phrases indulged in night after night in hundreds of London ball-rooms? How could he (Yeldham) tell whether Katharine loved Gordon or not? He had no clearer indication than the readiness of a joyous, enthusiastic, rather trivial nature to believe in the existence of what it hoped and desired; he shrunk from the idea of the lad's disappointment, but, after all, he knew Gordon Frere too well to suppose that he would be unlike the remainder of mankind, that he would not get over it in time—in perhaps no very long time. Had it been himself now,—had he loved Katharine Guyon and another came to win her from him by his superior wealth—but he would not pursue so futile a thought as that,—he had nothing to do with love. Hard work, and not the indulgence of fancy, was his lot; and he was content. He wished it was over though, and that Gordon knew the worst.

These and many other thoughts resembling them chased each other through Yeldham's brain, and rendered it difficult to him to keep up even the desultory conversation for which only Streightley was disposed. The friends parted at the railway station, and Yeldham betook himself at once to his chambers. It was a still, hot evening, and the airlessness of the rooms oppressed him. He was a man little influenced by such things ordinarily; yet this evening the grim cheerlessness, the dust, the ungentle disarray, in whose disorderliness there was a kind of order, of which he held the key; the harsh bundles of papers, the very fittings of the rooms, in which all was scrupulously designed for use, and as devoid of ornament as only true British business upholstery knows how to be,—all these things made themselves suddenly apparent. He revolted against them, against his life in general. It suddenly seemed alike hard and useless: what was he grinding away like this for? supposing his object accomplished, *cui bono*? An unwholesome frame of mind to be betrayed into, even for a little while—a relaxation, a renunciation

of the great principle of duty which had upheld and guided him so long ; and Charles Yeldham knew that it was so, and felt afraid of himself. He shrank from the first insidious chill of the advancing tide of discontent ; he recognised the deadliness of it.

“ Yes, that’s it,” he said thoughtfully, when, having emptied his letter-box, and looked over the memoranda left for his inspection by his clerk, he sat moodily by the open window, through which faint sounds from the river reached his ears : “ Yes, that’s it. I have seen a fine place to-day, and talked with a rich man—a man who hardly knows how rich he really is, I fancy—about what he is to do with his money ; and I suppose I am actually envious, cut up by the sight of something desirable that never can be mine. He is going to invest in happiness, is he?—to buy a beautiful idol, and set her up in a splendid shrine ? he’s rich enough to do it, if he likes. I wonder how it is really. I wonder whether he will be as happy as he believes. But no—I don’t wonder any thing of the kind, of course ; no one ever was or will be, since life is

limited, and faith is infinite. It's a dull business, I fancy, even at the best—as dull perhaps as it is to me, who am so very far off the best.”

And then Charles Yeldham rose, shook off the unusual and perilous mood which had held him already too long, and sat down resolutely to his work. It was very late that night when he went to bed; and sleep kept away from him in a harassing manner. The events of the day reproduced themselves in his thoughts, which escaped his control, and dragged him in their course. The strange imbroglio in which he found himself engaged; the clashing interests of two friends, in whom he was greatly though not equally interested; the certain crash of the hopes and projects of one of them; his uncertainty of the extent to which Streightley had received encouragement, but which his knowledge of Robert's real diffidence of character and unconsciousness of his own value in the eyes of a scheming and mercenary society, induced him to believe must have been considerable; his doubts as to the course he ought to pursue towards Gordon;—no wonder he could not sleep while

these conflicting thoughts battled with each other in his mind.

The practical result of his cogitations was, that Charles Yeldham decided on postponing any communication with Frere until his return. Gordon was not likely to write to him—he hated letter-writing rather more than he hated any other kind of mental exertion ; and whether his application to his father might have good results or not, he would no doubt return without delay. On the other perplexing question—had Streightley proposed to Miss Guyon?—Yeldham ardently desired information ; but for the present there was no means of attaining it within his reach. He must wait like the others—only not like them in this, that he did not wait and hope. He was only an outsider, an inconsiderable person, the recipient of half-confidence on one side, the confidant of baseless hopes, as he feared, upon the other ; while to one principally concerned he was nothing. No conjuncture of affairs could make him an object of importance in the life of the proud beautiful girl, whose fair face came between him and every thing on which he

strove to fix his attention ; the only woman's face which had ever charmed Charles Yeldham.

Hester Gould had seen a good deal of her friends at Hampstead since the evening on which she had made so favourable an impression on Mr. Daniel Thacker. She had accompanied her dear Rachel and Rebecca to the Botanical promenade, whither they had repaired arrayed in much splendour, and with the gorgeousness of colouring and richness of material affected by their nation. Mr. Thacker had joined the party, and had exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable to Miss Gould, whom he admired more than ever, when he contrasted the taste and propriety of her dress with the splendid array of his sisters, from which he shrunk with dismay. As it suited Hester's plans for obtaining information that Daniel Thacker should succeed in these efforts, he did succeed, and she had enjoyed an opportunity of observing Miss Guyon closely and attentively, during her animated conversation with Gordon Frere, and also during her father's *empresé* introduction of

Streightley to her notice. She had decided, with characteristic readiness, on entering the grounds, that she would tell Thacker that she wished to see Miss Guyon; and she had done so. Mr. Thacker had entertained a distinct purpose of business, in addition to that of pleasure, in coming to the *fête*; and it was a source of conscientious gratification to him that he found himself enabled to serve both. He had been informed by Mr. Guyon that Streightley would be there, and he resolved to see for himself how that gentleman stood with Miss Guyon. Thus he and Hester were each bent upon a similar object. There was, however, one material difference between their modes of pursuing it. Mr. Thacker did not begin to watch Katharine until Streightley joined her. Hester Gould watched her from the first moment she distinguished her figure amid the gay group, which was one of the most conspicuous in the gardens. She watched her, not with the jealous gaze of an angry woman watching a dangerous rival, but with unclouded, unprejudiced senses, with close admiring attention, and the keen perception of a

woman gifted with intuitive knowledge of the world, a cool temper, and unusual discretion. She had seen expectation and pleasure in every line of Miss Guyon's expressive face, as Gordon joined her; she had marked the heightened colour, the brightened eye, as they passed and repassed each other; she had heard the note of irrepressible gladness in the sweet musical voice; and Hester Gould knew that Katharine Guyon loved the fair-haired young man, in whose air and figure she recognised the ease and self-possession, the simplicity and frankness, which made Gordon so attractive, as well as the girl who was giving herself up to all the unrestrained happiness of young love knew it. Hester did not ask her companion who Gordon Frere was; she did not attract his attention to the young gentleman at all; on the contrary, she engrossed it so completely, that when she said quietly, "There is Ellen Streightley's brother talking to your friend's daughter now, Mr. Thacker," Daniel looked round with a start, and felt that he had almost forgotten the business part of his purpose.

A bow of recognition had passed between Mr. Guyon and Mr. Daniel Thacker, but Robert Streightley had not seen Miss Gould. It had not been her intention that he should see her; her purpose was to observe him closely, and she had effected it. She was no more mistaken in her estimate of his sentiments than in that of Katharine's; and it was characteristic of her that, though her observations changed a vague surmise into a positive certainty, a threatening risk into a certain present danger, she betrayed not a sign of uneasiness or discouragement. Neither her colour nor her countenance changed, though she saw before her eyes the overthrow of a scheme cherished long and deeply—though she could only calculate the chances in her favour by a vague speculation on the possible fortune and position of the young man she had seen with Katharine; or, supposing he had neither, on Katharine's strength of determination in opposition to her father. It was also characteristic of Hester Gould that, though she had determined to marry Streightley without permitting herself to love him, she told herself that

night that she felt a degree of dislike to Katharine Guyon, which might, if she did not take care, grow into hatred.

“She is my unconscious and involuntary rival,” said the strange woman, whose candour towards herself was never laid aside, “and I must not hate her; for hatred is troublesome—a passion—and I will never put myself under the tyranny of a passion.”

Hester Gould was at the Brixton Villa when Robert returned from his visit to Middlemeads. Mrs. Streightley and his sister were aware that he had gone into the country, but they knew no more. When he examined the letters sent by his orders from the City, he found among them one from Mr. Guyon, requesting him, if possible, to call on him on the following day, leaving the hour to his selection, but urging his attention to the request. The letter was a dainty missive, with a fine coloured monogram on the seal, and expressing in its appearance as wide a difference between itself and Robert's ordinary correspondence as it was in the power of stationery to convey. Ellen

Streightley was one of those young ladies blessed with a taste for simple pleasures, and who rated the possession of crests and monograms very high among them. Accordingly she exclaimed,

“O Robert, that’s something in my line. Do let me have it !”

He handed her the envelope.

“O, how delightfully intricate ! I can’t make it out. What are the letters, Robert ? Whose name is it ?”

“The letters are K.S.G.,” said Robert, rather reluctantly.

Hester watched him closely : “O, that’s it, is it ? but what is the name ?”

“Katharine Sibylla Guyon,” replied Robert ; and still Hester watched his embarrassment. “But the note is from Mr. Guyon—he wants to see me. I suppose he wrote it at his daughter’s desk.”

Ellen perceived nothing of her brother’s embarrassment, and went on :

“Robert, you never saw Hester the other day at the Botanical Fête, but she saw you ; and you

were talking to such a beautiful girl; she says she is sure it was Miss Guyon,—was it?”

“Yes,” returned her brother, “that was Miss Guyon; it must have been, for I did not know any other lady who was there. I am sorry I did not see you, Miss Gould. Did you enjoy the *fête*?”

“Very much indeed,” said Hester. “I was particularly struck with Miss Guyon. She seems to be very much admired. I saw a gentleman with her before you arrived,—a very young man with fair hair, very handsome. He seemed completely captivated, I thought. You must excuse my talking such nonsense, ma’am; but I really was amused looking at them. Do you know who he is, Mr. Streightley?”

“I fancy from your description the gentleman in question is a Mr. Gordon Frere,” Robert answered in a formal tone, whose bitterness and displeasure Hester Gould did not fail to recognise. She turned the conversation at once, and took her leave early, having received all Ellen’s confidences before Robert’s return, and having duly admired

the mingled piety and sentiment of the Reverend Decimus Dutton's latest letter.

Ellen retired immediately after Hester's departure, and was soon fast asleep, with a neat packet of the missionary's love-letters under her pillow, and a locket containing a photographic likeness of that apostle, which might have taken a prize for feebleness, resting upon her innocent breast.

Robert Streightley sat up late with his mother, and told her of his visit to Middlemeads, his purposes respecting the estate, and the hopes which had led to their formation.

CHAPTER X.

STRUGGLE.

ROBERT STREIGHTLEY slept but little on the night after his visit to Middlemeads; for that note which he had found awaiting him from Mr. Guyon sat heavy on his soul. Wanted to see him on particular business, eh? What did that particular business mean? Not more money advances, surely? Such transactions as he had had with Mr. Guyon were small enough to a man accustomed to the particular kind of business, the loans and contracts and subsidies, with which the firm of Streightley and Son were in the habit of dealing; but yet Robert, however wilfully blind, could not shut his eyes to the fact that he had already supplied Mr. Guyon with loans for which he had nothing like adequate security. Could Mr. Guyon possibly mean to touch upon that other subject,

which, as a man of the world, he must have already divined lay very close at Robert Streightley's heart? Could he intend to broach the question of his daughter——? As the idea crossed Streightley's mind he felt his cheek flush, and the cold beads of perspiration start out upon his forehead.

For he was an honourable man, brought up in an honourable school, where "a fair fight and no favour" had been the motto from time immemorial, and where any one taking undue advantage or seeking to compass his ends by unfair means toward his rival would have been scouted with ignominy. And he felt—how could he but feel?—that the struggle in which he was at that moment engaged was scarcely being conducted in the same open manner. He felt that he was creeping up towards the assault under the protection of a hireling guerilla force, which, with all the advantage of the knowledge of the ground, was pushing its renegade advantage, furthering his advance here, throwing out earthworks for the hindrance of the enemy there, and all from the mere sordid

love of gain and chances of plunder, but without the smallest heartiness of feeling in the matter. Not a nice feeling for a man of Robert Streightley's sense of punctilio. It galled him, and he chafed against it sadly during the long watches of that night. What was it? a caprice, a sudden fancy, a madness which had stung him,—that he, a mature man of confirmed bachelor habits, with his own household gods around him, and his own life completely settled and hitherto sufficient, should suddenly break through all his customs—yes, that would be nothing, but break through them in a weak and feeble manner—break through them in a way in which he, so far as he read it to himself, took no active part, but suffered himself to be the mere tool and instrument—for his own purposes indeed—in hands which were certainly not exempt from suspicion of being soiled. This was bad, very bad indeed. What should he say to himself suppose a parallel case in the business world—that world which he understood, which had hitherto been his sole life, and out of which he felt he could not with safety emerge—had been sub-

mitted to him? Why, he would have declared that, as a point of honour, a man in that position ought at once to set himself free from such trammels. And if in business, surely in love there was all the more reason for his doing so. For his part he would hesitate no longer; he would at once drop the Guyon acquaintance, sinking the advances which he had up to that point made to Mr. Guyon, and writing them off as salutary experience lightly paid for, and— And then, as he lay tossing on his fevered pillow, rose before him a vision of Katharine in all her grace and beauty—Katharine saucily laughing at Mr. Mostyn's solemn vanity; Katharine the cynosure of all at the Botanical promenade, queening it amongst the loveliest and the best-bred, evoking admiration from all; Katharine with earnest face and downcast eyes, then with flushed cheek and sparkling glance, in conversation with Gordon Frere—No! that last thought was too much. In Robert Streightley's nature there lay hitherto latent an amount of mad, blinding, unreasoning jealousy, whose existence was suspected by none of his friends, by him least

of all ; but it leapt into flame as this last picture crossed his mind, and all thoughts of withdrawal from the career in which he had suffered himself to be embarked shrivelled up before its scorching heat. It should not be from want of perseverance on his part, nor from want of employment of all the resources at his command, that he would fail in this the—yes, the really first scheme in his life in which he had taken hearty interest. He would need all his skill, and tact, and patience to carry it through—ah ! if he could only sleep now—if he could only forget for an instant those haunting eyes, that queenly form, that sweet winning smile !

He lay awake during all the early hours of that morning ; and it was nearly five o'clock before he sunk into a heavy, unrefreshing slumber, from which, despite old Alice's repeated warnings, he did not wake until long past nine. Then he had his bath and dressed himself, and went slouching down to breakfast with pale face and red eyelids, and a wearied anxious look. Mrs. Streightley had ere this sallied forth armed

with a complete library of little red books, over which she waged weekly warfare with the neighbouring tradespeople; and Ellen had an "early service" on, followed by a little light recreation of district-visiting and a small interlude of first meeting of coal and flannel fund; so that Robert had only his old nurse to watch over him at breakfast, and render every mouthful additionally distasteful by her comments.

"Well, Lord knows I never thought to have lived to have seen this day," said the old woman, when Robert, after a vain attempt at eating, pushed his plate away from before him—"that any child of your father's, let alone you, for whom he thought, and cared, and slaved most, should have quarrelled with the victuals provided for him in this house, I didn't expect."

"Ah, nurse!" said Robert, trying to smile, "it's not what's provided—I'm not well just now, somehow—I—"

"Not well, indeed! I know what's the matter with you. You're in love, and pleased with ruin as the saying is,—that's what ails you. O, don't

frown and look so; do you think the old woman don't know those signs, Robert, my boy? No appetite, and looking a long way off, and never speaking when spoke to? Lor' bless yer. And do you think old Alice don't know what that means? Come, they're all out, Robert! tell me who it is. Tell the old woman who nursed you when you couldn't speak, or scarce cry, for the matter of that, you was that weak; and the doctor never thought to have brought you through it, and wouldn't if it hadn't been for me, though I say it as shouldn't; tell old Alice all about it, deary; tell her and trust her, as you used to—O, so long ago."

"There's nothing to tell, Alice," said Robert with a forced laugh, rising from his chair; "you've made a pretty story for yourself, nurse, but I'm too old now to be amused at it even, much less to think of taking one of the characters. I'm a little overdone with business, that's all."

"Is it?" said the old woman shortly. "Well, —if it's business, that's all right. But it's the first time since ever I've been connected with the

house of Streightley and Son, and that's nigh fifty year, that I heard it was necessary to forward the business of the house, or to captivate the brokers and the shipping-agents and that like, by dressing oneself up in fal-lal clothes, and by dancing attendance at opera and play houses (I found the papers of them in your pockets) until all hours in the morning. And I'm thinking that if that *is* the way, your father made but a poor hand at it, Master Robert; and it's a great mercy that he didn't ruin the whole concern." And so saying, and with a sniff of great meaning, the old lady retired from the room.

By no means reassured or made more comfortable even by this short interview—for he was a nervous man in some things and very much disliked what he called "being upset"—Robert Streightley pushed the breakfast things away from him, and started off for town. He had dropped the omnibus long since, and took a cab as a matter of course; and as he journeyed along he could not help contrasting the splendour of the house he had yesterday visited with the meanness of

that one which he had just left. Both were his own, and both were to a certain extent typical of his life : in the latter with frugal commonplace people his money had been made ; in the former with one bright being it should be spent. Yes ; he had had enough of this daily grind of business, this sordid strife ; and he had determined that henceforth—if his hopes were realised—he would live a different life. If his hopes were realised ? what forbade their realisation ? This man,—this Gordon Frere, was younger it is true, better-looking, more of a “ lady’s man ” than he ; but he himself was not so old, not so hideous, not so—Ah ! good God ! What a fool he was for arguing the question in this way, even to himself ! He felt that he loved this girl, and that on that deep love and earnest devotion alone must he rely for the success of his suit.

He found Mr. Guyon awaiting him in the dining-room, with the *Morning Post* on the very verge of the table ; and a large blotting-book, a portentous inkstand, and a perfect armoury of steel pens close in front of him. The flavour of

Turkish tobacco hung round the apartment, and a cut-glass goblet containing the remains of a draught that looked suspiciously like brandy and soda-water stood on the velvet mantelpiece. Mr. Guyon himself, dressed in the loose lounging jacket and the Turkish trousers, lay on the sofa with the butt-end of a cigarette in his mouth, and extended his hand to his friend in cordial greeting.

“I take this doosid kind of you, my dear Streightley, coming round in this way when I asked you. Doosid kind!” said Mr. Guyon; “and I show my appreciation of it by receiving you without the least ceremony or the least humbug—which is the greater compliment. When one says to a fellow, ‘I want to see you on a matter of business,’ the fellow who’s good enough to come round naturally expects to see the fellow who sent for him in a state of business—stiff shirt-collar, and almanac, and all that kind of thing. That’s what I myself should do to some fellows; but I don’t to you. I say to myself, ‘He’s above all that sort of dodgery. He’s a

real man of business, and would see through it at once. Let him take me as I am. I'm an idle, nothing-doing, pleasure-seeking son of a gun: he knows it; why should I attempt to disguise my natural self from him and prove myself to be somebody else? Let him see me as my natural self."

Here Mr. Guyon paused for an instant to take a sip from the cut-glass goblet and to throw away the butt-end of the cigarette. Feeling it incumbent on him to say something, Robert Streightley murmured, "Very kind!"

"No," said Mr. Guyon, raising himself on his elbow, and looking lazily across the table at his visitor, "not very kind. Shrewd, perhaps, but not kind. When a man is in want of serious advice, and goes to the fountain-head for—that kind of thing—boldly and without scruple, he may be said to be shrewd. Now, that's my case; and I come to you."

This, so far, was so like the commencement of Mr. Guyon's conversations when loans were in question that Streightley had made up his mind

that more money was required; he changed his opinion, however, as his host proceeded.

“Now, my dear Robert,—you’ll forgive an old fellow’s familiarity, won’t you? I don’t often indulge in a fancy, but when I do I’m like the—ivy, damme, I cling. You can see, you must have seen plainly enough long since, that I’m not a man of business. In three words, I hate it. If I had been a rich man, I’d have had a fellow to do all my business for me while I smoked my cigarette and looked on; and hitherto whenever it’s been a question of business, money, and all those horrible details arising from the want of it, I’ve shirked it as long as I could, and then stumbled through it in a devilish blind, stupid, haphazard kind of manner. That’s been all very well so far; but now another question arises,—a very different question—one touching the heart and that kind of thing, and the welfare of a person who—however, I’ll go into that by and by;—a question on which I feel so deeply, that I’ve determined to be guided by the advice of the clearest-headed man of my acquaintance—and so I’ve sent for you.”

Robert Streightley bowed, and murmured a few words of incoherent thanks. Not money! Question on which he felt so deeply! What was Mr. Guyon driving at?

"I will be perfectly plain with you, my dear Robert," said Mr. Guyon, "frank as the day, all open and aboveboard. I won't disguise from you, I don't attempt to disguise it from myself, that perhaps there never was a man less fitted than I am to have been blessed with what would be a crowning solace to many men—a daughter." Streightley involuntarily started as these words met his ear; and Mr. Guyon noticed the start, but he did not betray himself, and proceeded. "I'm not a domestic man, and not cut out for domestic happiness. I believe my enemies call me a loose fish, and 'pon my soul I think they're right. I like my rubber and my club, and—in fact, my freedom. I'm a sort of claret-and-*entrée* butterfly, and was never intended for the roast-joint and bread-and-cheese *ménage* of respectability and home consumption. However, what was intended and what is are two very different things. I have a daugh-

ter, and—well, you're a man of the world, and I won't bore you with a father's maudlin praises of his child. She is—there, I was very near breaking into what I had just declared I would not do!—what I mean to say is, her future is my greatest care. I've been a man of the world myself, and I know all she will be exposed to, and, my dear Robert, I tremble when I think of it. I've only to refer to my own conscience to see what might be in store for her. Her poor mother—of whom she is the very image—was weak enough to marry me; and though—though I always treated her as a gentleman should treat his wife, by Jove! I know I—many shortcomings."

Here Mr. Guyon buried his face in a large white pocket-handkerchief; and Streightley, not knowing what to say or do, drummed vacantly on the table.

"You follow me, my dear boy? Of course, I knew you would," resumed Mr. Guyon after a momentary pause. "Now wait and hear the rest. A girl like Katharine, possessing—well, what I suppose even I may call many attractions—will ne-

cessarily receive a vast amount of admiration from all sorts of men ; and it will be my duty—and a duty which I shall perform with the greatest strictness ; she has no mother, you know, poor girl ! and I must be doubly vigilant—to see that she does not get led away and tempted into any foolish alliance by any good-looking young fashionable fop with nothing but his good looks to recommend him. What my girl requires in a husband—for she is light and giddy, like the rest of her sex—is ballast, my dear Robert ; a man of matured experience and not too young in years ; one whom she could look up to, who could give her the position which her beauty, and—I may say her birth—entitle her to ;—that's the sort of husband to whom alone I should be happy in giving my Katharine.”

Mr. Guyon paused once more, and Streightley bowed again in an absent manner, his right hand all the time plucking at his chin.

“The—the ideal, if I may so call it, that I have just drawn by no means resembles the writer of a letter which I received this morning honouring me by a proposal for Katharine's hand.”

Streightley's arm dropped upon the table, and he leant forward with an eager gaze. "Yes, my dear Robert, the Goths are already in full march upon the—what d'ye call 'em?—Capitol; and it is under these circumstances that I have sent for you to ask your advice."

"You—you're very good," murmured Streightley; "and of course any thing that I can do—but I really scarcely see in such a matter as this—and without knowing—knowing any thing of the—the parties—"

"My dear Robert, you don't think I would have sent for you with the notion of making any half-confidences. You shall know every detail. The writer of this letter," pursued Mr. Guyon, producing a packet from his desk,—“of these two letters rather, for there is an enclosure for Katharine which I have not yet delivered—is a young man whom you may have seen with us—a Mr. Gordon Frère. A doosid good-looking, well-born, well-connected young fellow, who seems tremendously in earnest about it too,” continued Mr. Guyon, balancing his trim gold eyeglasses on the bridge of

his nose ; “ for he writes to me to say—to say that —there, I need not read his letter—the gist of it is that he’s been down to his father, at some place in the country where he writes from, and his father, who is a member of the House, has promised to use his influence with Government to get him a decent berth. Now that’s plucky and honourable—I like that, eh, Robert ? ”

“ O yes, sir—very honourable indeed,” said Streightley nervously. “ I think you mentioned that you had not forwarded the enclosure to Miss Guyon ? ”

“ Not yet,—no. I was desirous of having your opinion—as a man of business—on the proposal.”

It had come at last then, this long-expected blow to that dream of future happiness in which, spite of his own better reasoning, he had dared to indulge. She would be wrested from him—be taken to the heart of that smooth-spoken dandy whom he had loathed from the first instant of seeing him. All her loveliness—ah, how he remembered each brilliant charm!—would go to grace the life of that silly fop. The blood rushed back

to Robert Streightley's heart as he thought of all this; his teeth were clenched, his pallid lips trembled and shook, and he thought that if he had had Gordon Frere before him at that instant he could have killed him without remorse. For an instant his better feeling struggled with his passion—the struggle was short and sharp, but the passion was victorious; and he said, in a strange dry voice,

“This gentleman scarcely fulfils the requirements you named just now, Mr. Guyon?”

“Admirably put, my dear Robert—clearly and admirably put! I must allow it, he does not.”

“If there were some one who, by his age and position at least, was calculated to—to be to this young lady—what you—”

“Yes, my dear Robert, yes!—”

“Who—” Then with a great gulp—“I'm a bad hand at beating about the bush, sir. What I have seen of Miss Guyon has so enthralled me, that—that I would give my life to win her for my wife.”

- He sought his handkerchief to wipe his fevered

lips, but Mr. Guyon caught his hand and pressed it warmly. "You, Robert, you? My dear boy, those are the happiest words that my ears have heard this many a day. You? Why, in a father's—what you may call fondest dreams, I could not have hoped for such good news as this! You? Why, of all people on earth, the very man!"

"The very man" looked any thing but happy as he sat there with pallid lips and puckered forehead and rapidly-beating heart—sat there silent and downcast, only occasionally raising his eyes to glance at the letter which Mr. Guyon had placed on the table before him. At that letter he stole long wistful glances; it seemed to possess for him a kind of baleful attraction; and after a short interval his regard fixed on it so directly that his companion could not fail to notice it. But though Mr. Guyon fully comprehended what was passing within Robert Streightley's breast, it by no means suited him to refer to it at once.

"My dear Robert," said he, after a few minutes' pause, "the unexpected delight of your communication just made has really taken me—

even old stager as I am—what I may call off my legs! I understand you to propose for my daughter's hand?"

"The very man" said never a word, but bowed his head abstractedly.

"Then I congratulate you and myself, my dear boy!" said the elder man, again seizing his companion's passive hand—"and I think we may regard it as a settled thing. My daughter has not seen much of you at present, but I am quite certain that when she once comes to know the qualities of your head and heart, she will—"

"What about that letter, Mr. Guyon?" said Robert Streightley in a cold, hard voice, pointing to the envelope still lying on the table.

"That letter!" echoed Mr. Guyon, his face falling considerably. "Well, my dear Robert, there's no denying that—eh? That letter—you see that young man Frere, Gordon Frere, gentlemanly fellow, good address, and all that kind of thing, has had opportunities of—in fact making his way, which—wilful woman and so on. Gad,

if that letter were delivered, there's no knowing how things might turn out!"

Streightley's heart sunk within him, and he turned faint and sick; but he controlled himself sufficiently to say:

"Then you were a little rash in your congratulations, Mr. Guyon?"

"Not at all, my dear boy, not at all. Recollect—I spoke of a contingency. I said—if that letter were delivered."

"If that letter were delivered to Miss Guyon? Do you mean to say that you would dare to withhold it from her?"

"'Dare' is a very awkward word, my dear Robert. It appears to me that if one could select two men as judges of what should or should not be addressed to a young lady, they would be her father—and her intended husband."

"But that letter!"

"Well, my dear fellow—that letter? Shall I give it to Katharine? Shall we instal Mr. Gordon Frere into what should and what will be your position?—shall I subject myself to a fortnight's

confounded rows, and finally saddle myself for life with a 'detrimental' son-in-law? or shall I quietly put it by, and acquaint my daughter with your very delightful proposal? My dear Robert, you look aside and shake your head; but I am an older man than you, and know that I am—that we are—acting for the best. Recollect what the fellow—Kean, I think—says in the play: 'He that is robbed not wanting what is stolen, let him not know it and he's not robbed at all.' Doosid good that, and doosid appropriate. So we'll settle upon that course, eh? and you'll leave all to me?—What! you're not going, my dear boy—you'll stay to luncheon?"

"Not this morning, thank you; not now, Mr. Guyon—I—I must go now!" and Robert Streightley passed into the street, and for the first time in his life felt a sense of shame at his heart, and a desire to shun the glances of those whom he encountered.

Mr. Guyon, so soon as the door had closed behind his friend, drew his chair to his desk, carefully read through Gordon Frere's letter to

Katharine, hitherto unopened, replaced it and the letter to himself in their envelope, which he carefully endorsed with the words "Shown to R. S." and the date, and locked them away in a private drawer. Then he wrote a rather long and elaborate letter to Mr. Frere, addressed it with great care, was very natty in his arrangement of its postage-stamp, sealed it with a large splodge of red wax bearing his coat-of-arms, and went upstairs.

On the third night after the events just recorded Charles Yeldham and Gordon Frere were walking up and down the departure platform at London Bridge, by the side of the mail-train just about to start. Frere was dressed in travelling costume, and looked, as most young fellows do in such garb, sufficiently picturesque. But his face was deadly pale, save where there were blotches of bright red under his eyes.

"Now listen, Charley," said he, "and hear my last words. I go away, cursing that woman.

You know I'm not romantic, or melodramatic, or any thing of that kind; but she's spoilt my life for me, and I curse her for it. It's too bad,—by the Lord, it's too bad! You know how I—yes, damme, how I loved her. Followed her about like a spaniel, and she could have done any thing with me. And then never to keep her appointment, never to send me a line; and then when I write and make her a regular offer, never to take the least notice—not a line, by Jove!—and to leave her infernal old father to write to me that she's engaged to that cold-blooded, mannerless beast, Streightley! O, I know he's a friend of yours; but, damme! it's too bad! And when the governor, dear old boy, had actually got me a nomination to the Treasury, and—however, that's thrown up, and I'm going out to an infernal German principality to be secretary to that bewigged old fool in that carriage, and leaving you, and all through the tricks of that heartless coquette! O yes, all right! I hear the bell, and I'm going to get in. Now, God bless you, old boy; but recollect my last

words. I leave this place cursing that girl, and I'll be even with her yet!"

Mr. Frere wrung his friend's hand and sprang into the carriage as the train began to move. Charles Yeldham waited until the last glimmer of its red lamps had died away, then turned slowly round, and walked towards his dreary chambers.

"It's very bad for you, Gordon, my poor boy!" said he to himself as he strolled along; "very bad indeed, just now! but I sadly fear it will be worse for others in the long-run—and for poor Bob Streightley worst of all!"

CHAPTER XL

LEFT LAMENTING.

THE morning sun, which arose on the world with its accustomed regularity, shone steadily on to its noonday splendour; but found Katharine no more resigned or peaceful than she had been on the previous night. She had been little used to opposition or contradiction, and she did not brook them easily. That she should have been disappointed in the matter of Mrs. Tresillian's ball was natural enough; but that she should have been put so completely out of temper and out of spirits by the disappointment as to have made the fact glaringly apparent to her father and the "City man," was not at all natural to Katharine's well-bred self-command and sense of what was due to good manners and her self-respect. She was discontented with herself, provoked with Lady Hen-

marsh, and miserable in reflecting upon the disappointment which Gordon Frere had doubtless sustained, and in fancying that he might have imputed her absence to coldness or caprice. Love had taken possession of the girl, had utterly humbled her, and she had no thought of her own charms, her own importance, no notion that Frere might hesitate to ask her to share a destiny which could not be represented as brilliant; she never considered or questioned his position for a moment. She knew he was well-born, well-connected, and in good society; but she knew and cared to know nothing beyond. She had acquired the enchanting certainty that he loved her; she felt that the next time they met he would tell her so; and her heart had no room for any thing but the mingled rapture and suspense which proceeded from the delightful experience of the preceding day, and the pitiable disappointment of the preceding evening.

Katharine did not see her father on the morning after the Botanical Fête. When she went down to breakfast the dusty footman gave her a message from Mr. Guyon, to the effect that he found him-

self obliged to go out early on particular business, and as he could not say how long he might be detained, she must not expect him to ride with her—he would return to dinner. This message was a fresh annoyance to Katharine, a new exacerbation of her already irritated temper. There now, she should be unable to ride, and no doubt Gordon was looking forward to meeting her in the Park, and would be again disappointed; indeed he might think she was purposely avoiding him,—who could tell? Katharine pushed her untasted breakfast from her and hurried upstairs to the drawing-room, where she paced up and down before the long windows with an impatient tread. Would he come? Would he call on her at the delightfully unconventional early hour he had selected for his first well-remembered visit? Perhaps—nay surely he would! It was not far from eleven now; she glanced at the chimney-glass, smoothed her glossy hair, inspected the condition of her neat morning-dress; and then sat down to her piano to play all the tunes which he liked, and so get over the interval before his coming would be possible. But

the expedient was not successful; the gay strains died away in harmonised reveries, sometimes into silence, as the girl sat and thought of her lover—glorified by her imagination and exalted by her own fervent nature into a very different being from the real Gordon Frere. If Katharine could but have seen him at that hour, what a difference might it not have made to them and to others! He was turning over the leaves of a Railway Guide, and talking away to Yeldham in all the newborn impetuosity of his approval of his friend's advice, and his resolution to act upon it. Yes, he would go at once; he would not delay an hour, he would not trust himself to see Katharine again. If he had met her at the Tresillians, he should certainly have committed himself; and Yeldham was right, quite right; of course Mr. Guyon would only laugh at him; and very justly, unless he could put forward some decided prospect for his consideration. Perhaps it was better that he had had no understanding with Katharine as to meeting within a day or two; he might not have been able to resist seeing her again. He would write

her a note though, just a line saying he should be out of town for a few days—he must indeed, for she had asked him to inquire for some music she wanted at Cramer's: he could just write the note and get the music, and send both to Queen Anne Street before starting for the station. He flung down the Railway Guide, took up his hat and departed, whistling as he descended the staircase with an invincible light-heartedness, whereat Charles Yeldham smiled. The smile was not gay, however, and it vanished quickly, and the barrister laid down his pen, leaned his chin upon his folded hands, and gazed out of the window with eyes that saw nothing they looked upon. It was a most unusual thing for Charles Yeldham to indulge in a fit of abstraction, and the indulgence was brief. He brought his gaze and his thoughts back again with an effort, shook his hair from his forehead, and resumed his work doggedly.

Mr. Guyon, returning from his business expedition at about one o'clock, and proposing to let himself into the house by means of his latch-key, as he did not feel particularly desirous of an in-

interview with Katharine just then, and feared she might come down to seek him, if she heard a ring, found a commissionaire just in the act of pulling the bell.

"Wait a minute, my man," said Mr. Guyon in his cheery way; "I'll open the door," and he suited the action to the word. "What have you got there? O, I see,—a parcel and a note for my daughter. You're paid, are you, eh? Never mind; here's another sixpence—good-day."

The man turned away, well pleased, and Mr. Guyon, carrying the parcel in his hand, went on into his own room. There was a note with the parcel, which was evidently a roll of music. Mr. Guyon looked at it, considered it, finally, muttering "It will always be easy to say the fellow must have lost it," he opened and read the missive. As he did so, his face brightened up. "Out of town, eh? on important business; trusts to see her the moment he returns, eh? Not if I know it, Mr. Frere,—not if I know it." Then Mr. Guyon put the note carefully away in his pocketbook, for destruction at a convenient season.

He next proceeded to search among a heap of cards stuck into the frame of the chimney-glass for one bearing the inscription "Mr. Gordon Frere," passed it under the riband with which the parcel was fastened, and rang the bell.

"Take this to Miss Guyon," said he to the footman, who answered the summons. "A commissioner brought it just now."

Katharine was standing by one of the windows when the man entered the drawing-room, salver in hand. Her tall graceful figure and proud head expressed eager anticipation and waiting in their attitude.

"A parcel, ma'am," said the man; "a commissioner 'ave brought it."

"Put it down," she said, without turning her head; and several minutes elapsed before she looked round, or remembered the interruption. At length she sighed impatiently, and said aloud: "He will hardly come now, it is too near lunch-time; and if he comes later, the room is sure to be full of bores, as usual. However, I had rather he came, no matter who may be here. But it is very

stupid of him not to call early." At this moment her eye lighted on the parcel, and the card attached to it. The colour rushed violently into her face, and then subsided, leaving Katharine many shades paler than usual.

Mr. Guyon was in very good spirits when he met his daughter at lunch. He talked and laughed and made himself as agreeable as if she had been somebody else's daughter and worth cultivating. He congratulated Katharine on her appearance both at the *fête* and at dinner on the previous day; he asked her where her bonnet came from, and whether her milliner was determined to ruin him completely this season? To all these sallies Katharine replied little; she was pale, *distracte*, decidedly out of humour. Mr. Guyon shot sharp inquiring glances at her across the table, wholly unperceived. He was a little surprised at her mood. "By Jove!" he thought, "she has been harder bit than I suspected, and this has been a near thing, I fancy. I've only given Hetty the office just in time. Something must be done before this dandy fellow comes back,—and it won't be too easy to manage Kate either."

These reflections troubled Mr. Guyon a little, and repressed the fine flow of his spirits; but his daughter took as little notice of one of his moods as of the other.

"Have you heard how Lady Henmarsh is to-day?" she asked absently; and the seemingly harmless question brought a more impartially diffused colour to Mr. Guyon's face than the evenly-defined bloom which usually embellished it.

"No," he replied decisively; "have you?"

"I have not," said Katharine. "I was thinking of walking round there to inquire for her; but James makes out that there is so much to do, after yesterday, that I saw he would only grumble if I took him out,"—Mr. Guyon breathed rather quickly, and then looked relieved,—"and, as I knew if any thing serious had been the matter with her or Sir Timothy, she would have put us off for to-day, it didn't matter."

"Ah, by the bye, yes!" returned her father, "we dine there to-day."

It was rather odd that Mr. Guyon should have said this in a tone of reminiscent surprise; for

his particular business of that morning had included, if not entirely consisted of, a long interview with Lady Henmarsh; which interview had concluded with these words:

“Well, then, good-bye until seven. You quite understand?” on the part of the gentleman; and “Yes, I quite understand,” on the part of the lady.

It will be remembered that Mr. Guyon had despatched a note to his complaisant cousin in the course of the preceding day, which note had borne fruit in Katharine’s disappointment of the evening. It had also prepared Lady Henmarsh for Mr. Guyon’s visit, and had convinced her that he “meant business.” It is unnecessary to go into the details of the interview, which had taken place while Katharine had watched and waited throughout the dreary hours, and in which her fate was settled, so far as it was in the power of her father and her chaperone to settle it. Its bearings will all be clearly developed by the results; it is enough at present that each of the parties was satisfied with the views entertained and the promises made by the other.

Katharine looked very bright and beautiful that evening, and her manner was as gay and gracious as if Lady Henmarsh had not inflicted a severe disappointment upon her and seriously disconcerted all her plans and hopes for one day and night at least. Her pride had received a slight wound, not a deep or deadly one as yet, but it was keen, and sensitive, and thrilled to a touch; and that card, without note or message, had touched it. She recalled her last words to Gordon Frere, his last words to her, and their tone, which meant so much more; and she could not but recoil from this incident. There was some relief in fancying that he might have taken this way of evincing pique at her absence from the ball; and when this idea occurred to her she cherished it, and at last it gave her complete comfort. There is a sort of charm in such piques and pets, when they are not carried too far, and Katharine did not care to remember that had Gordon been offended, and taken such a way of showing it, he must have indulged temper at the cost of sense, as he must have known her absence

arose from no fault of hers. But Katharine, a remarkably clear-sighted person in most cases, was as blind and as silly as the rest of the world in this, and caught with eagerness at a reason which seemed to exalt her lover's devotion at the expense of his common sense. Yes, that was it! of course! How foolish she had been! they would meet to-morrow; even if he did not call, he always went to Lady Tredgold's "evenings," and there they should meet, and "make it up." Katharine's girlish spirits rose, under the influence of the conviction that she had been worrying herself unnecessarily, and she was even unusually charming. The dinner-party was a pleasantly-assorted one; Sir Timothy, a perfect gentleman, old and invalided as he was, prosed away indeed, at the end of the table, but she was not near him at dinner, and he never appeared in the drawing-room. She talked brilliantly; her low well-bred laugh was heard like frequent music amid the buzz of conversation; and Mr. Mostyn, who honoured Lady Henmarsh on the present occasion, made up his mind that Katharine should be his

next heroine. He calmly contemplated her animated face, and studied the details of her dress, considering whether she should be wedded to a clever Irish political adventurer (he knew a man whom he could "do" for the part admirably, and what was more and better, every one else knew him also), rescued from his brutality by the hero (Mr. Mostyn would be his own hero), and suffered to die of a broken heart in consequence of her hopeless passion for her rescuer; or whether she should merely retire, in her maiden bloom, into a convent, when the hero marries the duchess, out of compassion, and hangs wreaths of *immortelles* on the bell-handle of the holy house of our Lady of the Seven Dolours on each anniversary of the double event. While his mind was agitated by this dilemma, he heard Mr. Guyon say to Lady Henmarsh,

"Yes, we saw him yesterday at the Botanical Fête. I don't know that he mentioned your invitation. Katharine, did Mr. Frere say whether he was to dine with Lady Henmarsh to-day?"

Katharine turned her head quickly towards

her father, and there was a slight frown on her fair brow as she answered,

“No, papa,—certainly not! I did not know he had been asked. When did you invite him, Lady Henmarsh?”

“Several days ago, Kate ;—when I asked you all. I suppose he had something better to do ; and really he is so horribly conceited, and represents himself as in such request every where, he is quite welcome to stay away for me.”

The matter dropped there, but Katharine was very silent now ; and Mr. Mostyn, attributing her depression to the near termination of dinner, and the inevitable move, decided that her pensive tenderness was even more charming than her sparkling allurements.

In the drawing-room she was silent still. When opportunity offered she said to Lady Henmarsh :

“How did you send Mr. Frere your invitation?”

“How? Why, Kate, how inquisitive you are!” and her ladyship laughed,—rather a forced

laugh;—"by post, of course. To the Temple; that's all right, isn't it? I said, to meet a few friends, the Guyons, and one or two others. But, my child, I can't stay gossiping with you; there's Mrs. Weldon preparing to consider herself neglected and to take offence."

Katharine was not so much annoyed as she was puzzled by this incident. It is hardly necessary to tell the intelligent reader that no such invitation had ever been sent to Gordon Frere, and that the fabrication had been a happy idea of Mr. Guyon's, and hurriedly imparted to his colleague by a note before dinner. Frere's absence might be very short, and was undoubtedly very precious; and Mr. Guyon had determined to play a game which, if not exactly desperate, was very daring. This was the first card; he had played it, not with perfect, but with tolerable, success. With increased eagerness Katharine looked forward to the morrow; with such eagerness as took the healthy colour from her cheek and the limpid brightness from her eye, and replaced the one by a flickering flush, and the other by a look of anx-

iety and absorption. The morrow came, and she rode in the Park with her father, but did not see Gordon Frere. The routine of a London day followed; she drove out with Mrs. Stanbourne, and on her return looked over the cards which had been left during her absence, but there was not one bearing the name she longed to see. At dinner her father was in the gay spirits which had distinguished him since he had made Robert Streightley's acquaintance, and took no notice of her silence and dejection. She went to Lady Tredgold's reception, and there endured such pangs of expectation, suspense, mortification and anger, love and longing, as only a mind totally undisciplined by sorrow, and unaccustomed to finding its calculations disturbed by conflicting results, could undergo.

The history of the two days which succeeded that of the Botanical Fête, which had been such an eventful date in Katharine's life, and was destined to remain fixed in her memory for ever, was repeated in those which followed them. Weary waiting and wondering, heartsick longing and

anger, the blind wrath of a proud heart stung and outraged, the remorseful relenting of a girlish passionate heart,—through all these, and numberless other phases of feeling and suffering, Katharine Guyon struggled friendless and alone. Pride ruled the girl outwardly, as much as love reigned in her inwardly; and the only person to whom she would have spoken, Mrs. Stanbourne, had left town suddenly, having been called away to a friend who was dangerously ill. Katharine might not have spoken to her indeed, had she been available for purposes of confidence—the calmness and steadiness of the lady's nature might have repelled her, for this was an unfortunate effect which those qualities had frequently produced upon the impetuous and passionate young girl; but now that she was away, she felt that she would have done so, and regarded Mrs. Stanbourne's absence as an additional grievance and aggravation of the bitterness of her lot. The season was over, town was thinning fast, their own particular set had all broken up, and autumn engagements were either being eagerly discussed or busily entered upon.

Days wore on—how wearily, they only who know how long time is to those who watch and wait, can tell—and Katharine did not see the face of Gordon Frere or hear his name. The girl changed visibly under the suffering of this period ; the anxious look, so strange to her lustrous eyes, became fixed in them ; the soft music of her laugh ceased to ring in the ears of her companions ; her girlish gracefulness hardened into something defiant, very attractive to strangers, but which would have made one who loved her sad to see, and apprehensive for her future ; but no one who loved her was there to watch the change in Katharine Guyon with pre-scient eyes.

The day was hot, sultry, breathless ; the autumn had fairly set in, and beat fiercely upon the weary Londoners ; the sense of oppression produced by the immense circumference of stone and brick was heavy upon such of the world as had any chance of escaping from it. Such as had no chance probably did not like it ; “but then,” in homely expressive speech, they had to “lump it ;” and very few were likely to trouble themselves about

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them. The last flicker of the gaieties of the season had died out; and even Mr. Guyon had found it impossible to get up a Greenwich dinner-party to comprise more than four individuals, including Robert Streightley and Daniel Thacker. He had avoided his daughter as much as possible of late; and Mr. Streightley had sedulously sought her society, with every kind of tacit encouragement within her father's power to give him. It was the day named for the Greenwich dinner; and Katharine, glad to be alone, and yet feverish and miserable in her solitude, had refused to go to Lady Henmarsh's, there to hold a *causerie* on their several autumn plans.

"She will drag poor old Sir Timothy to some German baths or French watering-place, and she wants me to back her up in the cruelty," thought Katharine, as she contemptuously twisted up the note, which had contained the invitation, and desired Lady Henmarsh's page to tell his mistress she was busy and could not come; "but I won't. Why can't she go down to Deanthorpe and keep quiet?" She had been dawdling over her luncheon

and feeding her Skye terrier, without taking any interest in either occupation ; and she now leaned idly against the window-frame and gazed out wearily. She saw the hot, baked streets ; she saw the poor old woman opposite sitting by her basket of full-blown blowy nosegays, sheltering them and herself under the shade of a huge umbrella, fallen from its high estate on some family coach-box, and displaying sundry patches ignominious in their discrepancy with each other and general incongruity with the original fabric. The old woman was yawning, and sleeping by snatches, and Katharine's impatient weariness was increased by watching her. She turned away, and went upstairs to her own room. A newspaper lay on the table in the hall, and she took it up mechanically, and carried it with her. Her own room was spacious and airy, and physical ease and refreshment at least came to her with its stillness and its shade.

She sat down in an arm-chair by the window, and fell a-thinking on the invariable subject ; wondering, yearning, raging, as she had done now for days which had run on into weeks, during

every hour which had not been tranquillised by the anodyne of sleep. After a while she looked idly at the newspaper in her hand ; and in a few minutes her eyes lighted on a paragraph which announced the departure of Lord A—— as British *chargé d'affaires* to the court of F——, accompanied by Mr. Gordon Frere, who attended his lordship in the character of private secretary, and a numerous suite.

Katharine Guyon was not a fainting woman. She had never fainted in her life, and hysterical affections she held in equal suspicion and disdain. No merciful weakness came to lessen the physical anguish she experienced, when these few lines conveyed to her shrinking soul the full assurance of the fate that had befallen her. The physical suffering of a sudden grief is always terrible, most terrible where strength reigns with tolerable equality in body and mind. Her flesh crept and burned ; acute, agonising pain darted into her eyeballs, and transfixed them ; a slow shivering anguish seized upon her limbs, and caused her lips to part and shudder over the clenched teeth. No cry es-

caped her, nor sound except a moan, half of mental pain, half of the deadly sickness, the actual nausea, which every one who has ever sustained a severe shock of pain or fear knows is its invariable accompaniment. Black rings formed themselves in the air, and dropped from under her eyes, into what seemed to her like infinite space. She wondered dimly whether this could be any thing like death; and sat there, so feeling, so wondering, she had no idea what length of time. Her maid came to her when the hour for dressing for dinner arrived, and found her pale, motionless, and tearless.

"I'm not well, Marwood," she said; "as papa is out, I need not go down. If you'll help me to undress, I will go to bed."

The woman was utterly surprised. Illness was unknown to Katharine's vigorous frame and eager spirit. She acknowledged that her mistress looked ill, and suggested sending James for a doctor.

"Not on any account," said Katharine; "I am suffering for my obstinacy in riding too long in the sun yesterday, and eating ices last night. I shall be quite well in the morning."

The woman assisted her to undress, and left her, and Katharine lay down in her bed, feeling as if she should never rise from it again. The evening fell, the beautiful autumn night succeeded the brief twilight, and the fair morning dawned, and still she lay quite motionless, tearless, sleepless; speechless too, but for one short sentence whose agony of anger and outraged feeling defied restraint. It sounded strangely in the quiet of the room :

“ He was only amusing himself, after all. He *dared* to amuse himself with ME !”

Hester Gould had fulfilled her intention of finding out all she could about Robert Streightley's new friends, as she usually fulfilled all her intentions, quietly and completely. She had paid a friendly visit to Daniel Thacker's sisters, resident at Hampstead ; and having timed her visit fortunately, or it would be more correct to say judiciously, she had met Daniel, and extracted from him all the information he was disposed to give. She was not in the least deceived in her estimate of his frankness ; she knew that he had

more to tell respecting Mr. Guyon and his handsome daughter (Mr. Thacker called her "stunning") than the general facts into the disclosure of which she led him; but she was not unreasonable, and she read character accurately. She had not seen much of Daniel Thacker; for not being mistress of her own time, she could rarely visit the dwellers at Corby House at the hours which found that gentleman in the bosom of his family; but she had seen enough of him to understand him much better than most of his acquaintances did, and to feel a comfortable assurance that she could gain an influence over him, if any thing should occur to make it worth her while to do so.

Daniel Thacker possessed at least one sterling virtue—he was an excellent brother. Nothing in reason and within the compass of his means did he deny the handsome, red-lipped, dark-browed girls, who strongly resembled him, and were even more Jewish-looking than he. They had a good house, a comfortable establishment, a sufficiency of society among their own persuasion generally, a sufficiency of theatre- and concert-going, and

plenty of the savoury meat which their souls loved. They would have been happier perhaps—or they thought so—if their beloved brother, whom they devoutly believed to be the handsomest and most elegant man in Christendom or Jewry, had lived with them at Corby House ; but he had fully explained the impossibility on “business” grounds, and the docile Hebrews, Rebecca and Rachel, acknowledged the plea without hesitation. They were among the firmest, warmest, and most useful of Hester Gould’s friends, and they had been for a time her pupils. They had perseveringly spread her fame abroad among their *habitués* ; and as music is an invariable taste among the Jews, and their musical entertainments are splendid and numerous, their praises had done her solid service, and Hester’s time was fully filled by very lucrative engagements.

Rachel and Rebecca had been infinitely delighted by Hester’s arrival to pass the evening with them, and had gushingly expressed their pleasure.

“Tuesday evening too, Daniel’s evening : how

delightful!—he hardly ever misses. I am so glad; isn't she a dear?" said Miss Rachel in a sort of monologue, while she applied her large red lips several times to Hester's olive cheek.

The calculations of the sisters did not deceive them. Daniel came, smooth, good-humoured, affectionate, and obliging; and they passed a very agreeable evening. Miss Gould had what she called a "confidential cab," which attended her on special occasions, of which this was one; and as she drove away, having accepted an invitation to accompany the sisters to a Botanical "promenade" (it was the last of the season they said, and dear Hester must come), she made a little calculation of the gain of her visit, thus:

"Mr. Guyon is a fast man out at elbows, and a great friend of Daniel Thacker's. That means that he is largely in Daniel's power. Miss Guyon is a handsome, high-spirited girl, much admired, and with no fortune. I can see that Daniel has no notion of her—he would be snubbed, rich as he is, I suspect, even by the out-at-elbows father. But he has seen Robert with Mr. Guyon,

and for some reason or other—I don't know what reason *yet*—he is concerned in promoting a match between him and Miss Guyon. Can I prevent this? I fear not. We shall see; I must be most cautious not to purchase even a fair chance of doing so too dearly,"—here she thought intensely, and her brow clouded over heavily. "If I could find out that the girl does not care for him, I might make my way to her and put her on her guard; but suppose she does? No, no; I must not risk *all* until I know *all*."

Mr. Daniel Thacker's perfectly appointed brougham was conveying him rapidly to St. James's half-an-hour later; and as he smoked a choice cigar (part of a bankrupt lot dirt cheap at the price), he pulled his silky beard, and meditated upon Hester Gould and her questions.

"Knows Streightley and his mother and sister very well, does she? Thinks him a 'nice' man, but easily led—thinks his mother is *so* anxious he should marry, eh? Now what the deuce is *her* little game? Can't be to marry him herself, I should think, or she's just the woman to do it—

to have done it long ago. Devilish nice girl; real good-looking, and a rasper for determination, I should say. 'Gad, I should like to see a good deal more of Hester Gould."

CHAPTER XII.

VICTORY.

MR. GUYON was not troubled with sensitive feelings, and bashfulness or hesitation in the carrying out of any project on whose execution he had decided were completely foreign to his character. He possessed a happy mixture of hardness and effrontery, which enabled him to do very cruel things with charming lightness of heart and an engaging unconsciousness of demeanour, which had occasionally even deluded his victims themselves into thinking his intentions more harmless than his acts. He was a man whom even remorse, the evil form of repentance, had never visited, and who had never believed in any agency more supernatural than *luck*. He had been accustomed to watch the variations of that divinity pretty closely, and had arrived at a sort

of scheme of its operations; and just now he regarded good fortune as in the ascendant—a conviction which received signal confirmation by the success of his interview with Streightley. He had not distinctly acknowledged to himself that he dreaded finding an obstacle in Robert's conscientiousness; he had rather put his apprehensions to the score of the "City man's" pride.

"I can't pretend that she likes him, or that she does not like Frere," he had said over and over again, as he turned the hopeful project, which had succeeded so perfectly, in his mind. "He is not quite such a flat as to believe any thing of that sort. It all depends on his being satisfied to have the girl at any price; and he knows so little of the world and of women, that I do believe he'll be idiot enough to take her against her will. A pretty life she'll lead him; but that's no business of mine."

Mr. Guyon possessed one trivial and negative virtue—he never tried to deceive himself. Perhaps one reason why his hypocrisy had frequently been crowned with success was, that he reserved

it entirely for his transactions, sternly extruding it from his meditations. *Vis-à-vis* Ned Guyon, he was the soul of candour. True to this characteristic, when screwing up his courage to the inevitable interview with his daughter, which was the next performance in his programme, Mr. Guyon did not try to persuade himself, as a more shallow scoundrel would have done, that he was in reality doing the very best thing within his power for her, and establishing, in truth, a clear claim to her gratitude. He did not repeat that the man she loved was a frivolous fellow, who could never fill the heart and the intellect of such a woman, and was unworthy of her affection. He said nothing to himself of all he had said to Robert Streightley. He knew nothing, and he cared nothing about Frere's character; and the consideration of Katharine's unhappiness did not concern him in the least.

"She will be very rich," he thought; "and if that does not make her happy, she is a greater fool than I take her for—a greater fool even than Streightley."

Callous and unhesitating as he was, nevertheless Mr. Guyon felt considerable apprehension about the impending explanation with Katharine. No material disagreement had ever taken place between his daughter and himself. He had always had a sense of Katharine's intellectual superiority which had governed him in certain respects; and an unexpressed unwillingness to rouse a temper which he felt a tacit conviction he could not have restrained him from opposing her unnecessarily; so that his daughter had always given him credit for much more amiability and complaisance than he actually possessed. He was not afraid of her in any actively restraining sense, or he would not have entertained such a design as that he was now prosecuting against her; but he was afraid of a war of words with her; he was afraid that her keenness might lead her to suspicion; above all, he dreaded her girlish ignorance, her disregard of wealth, when wealth only was what he had to urge upon her acceptance.

The announcement of Gordon Frere's departure was the cause of almost as profound an emo-

tion to Mr. Guyon as to his daughter. To her it meant the extinction of hope, the blighting of joy, the outraging of love and pride, the awakening of passionate anger and agonising grief. To him it meant the termination of a period of most unpleasant suspense, during which he did not dare to take a step towards the furtherance of his plans, lest at any moment they might collapse, and defeat insure detection. But all had turned out rightly for him ; he was safe ; the young man—"the biggest fool of the lot" Mr. Guyon called him, with coarse contempt for the pliability of his victim—had received his sentence in silence and without protest, and had left England ; a circumstance beyond Mr. Guyon's hopes, which had extended only to his keeping out of Katharine's way until the scheme should have succeeded.

On his return from the dinner at Greenwich, which had been rather tedious, and during which Robert Streightley's abstracted look and dispirited manner had excited Mr. Guyon's scorn and apprehension, inducing him to think that if there were much delay Robert might become troublesome

and scrupulous after all, he, too, read in the evening journals the announcement which had come upon his daughter like the stroke of doom. Unmixed satisfaction was rapidly succeeded by a determination to act at once. He had seen as little as possible of Katharine for some time, pleading engagements and business when the rapid "thinning" of London prevented his procuring the presence of a third person to insure him against a *tête-à-tête*. But he had watched her; he had observed her restlessness, her anxiety, her abstraction and indifference. He had noted the shadow on her beauty, he had heard the harsh tone which now sounded in her voice, the unreal ring of her laugh,—had noted them without one touch of pity or hesitation, and been satisfied with the result. He recognised grief in all these symptoms, but he saw still more anger, pride, and defiance. Every thing that he observed gave him encouragement; and Lady Henmarsh, who did not know the whole truth, but had guessed at something very like it, had made satisfactory reports. She understood Katharine much better than her father

understood her, and had played the irritating game, in his interests, with a charming air of unconsciousness, and complete success. The first thing to be done was to see Lady Henmarsh; and as she was going to take Sir Timothy out of town in a day or two, no time was to be lost. Mr. Guyon could be an early man when it suited his convenience, and it happened to do so just then. He presented himself at Lady Henmarsh's breakfast-table, much to the surprise and a little to the confusion of "cousin Hetty," who had never quite lost the habit of liking to look well for "cousin Ned," and was conscious that she might have looked better than on this occasion. But "cousin Ned" had neither time nor inclination for the revival of *ci-devant* sentiment, and Lady Henmarsh soon perceived that "business" engrossed him wholly.

"My dearest Kate," said Lady Henmarsh, as, three hours later, she entered Miss Guyon's room, and found her up and dressed, indeed, but sitting idly by her bedroom-window, and looking as

though a month's illness had robbed her eyes of their lustre and her cheek of its bloom,—“what is wrong with you? Clarke tried to prevent my coming upstairs, but of course I knew you would see *me*. My dear girl, you look shockingly!”

“Do I?” said Katharine, forcing a smile; “I feel wretched enough. It is only the heat, I suppose, and the season. It is time for every one to leave town.”

“Every one seems to think so,” returned Lady Henmarsh; “except yourself and ourselves, almost every one is gone. I had such a number of callers yesterday, I was quite sick of them. So sorry you could not come round, dear; but you did quite right to keep quiet, if you did not feel well. By the way, Mr. Mostyn—I must not say your admirer, I suppose; but the gentleman who kindly permits you to admire him—came in while the Daventrys were there, and he looked quite sentimental when your message came. He actually condescended to ask why you did not go to Mrs. Tresillian's ball, and to say, but for Miss Guyon's absence, he should have pronounced it the best

ball of the season. You know his formal way. I am sorry you missed it, Kate ; they all agreed that it was a brilliant affair ; and Lily Daventry was in ecstasies about it. To be sure she's new to balls ; but how she did go on about Coote and Tinney's band and Gordon Frere's waltzing !”

Katharine winced. Lady Henmarsh played with a ring-stand, took up the rings one by one and examined them, keeping a close watch on the girl as she talked on.

“ What a goose that girl is, to be sure, but so pretty ! and if the men admire her so much, though she has not any sense, she is as well without it. What a flirt she is too ! It amused me to watch her trying her ringlets and her attitudes upon Mr. Mostyn. Now that Gordon Frere—as great a flirt as herself—is out of the way, she tries her hand upon him ; and he is so horribly vain, that though he was at the Tresillians' and saw her flirtation with Frere, he actually believes she is quite captivated. Why do you wear an opal ring, Kate ? you were not born in October ; it's unlucky, my dear.”

"Is it?" said Katharine languidly. "I did not know. Are the Daventrys going to Leyton?"

"Yes, they start to-morrow. By the bye, I was so surprised at Gordon Frere's appointment; weren't you? I never heard him mention it, and yet it appears it had been settled a long time. I am sorry I did not see him when he called."

"How do you mean that his appointment was settled?" asked Katharine, with great self-command. Lady Henmarsh turned her head away from the dressing-table, and looked full at her, as she answered:

"Why, Lord A. had promised to take him as his private secretary, when his turn should come; you know those diplomatic people have their regular order of succession; he told Lily Daventry all about it at the Tresillians' ball. He had been idling through the season, he said, and amusing himself the best way he could, in anticipation of going to work in earnest. He rather thought he should have gone a little earlier; and to tell you the truth, Kate, I wish he had." There was meaning in the speaker's tone, and

Katharine understood it. Her eye lighted angrily, as she asked, in the coldest possible voice :

“ Indeed ! may I ask you why Mr. Gordon Frere’s movements are of interest to you, Lady Henmarsh ? ”

“ Come, come, Kate, don’t speak like that to me,” said her friend ; “ you know perfectly well how dear you are to me, and what an interest I take in every thing that nearly or remotely concerns you. I’m sure you can’t deny that, my dear.”

A bend of the head, a softened expression in the face were the sole answer.

“ And I must say,” continued Lady Henmarsh, “ I am very much mortified at the way Gordon Frere has set people talking about you.”

“ About *me* ? ”

“ Yes, my dear, about you. He paid you very marked attention, and you received it with quite enough complacency to set people talking—don’t be angry, Kate, I don’t blame you ; you were not to know that he meant nothing. And then, for you, and me, the nearest friend you had—a friend

standing, in the eyes of the world, in the place of a mother—to be the only people of his acquaintance, as it appears we are, ignorant of the fact that he was going abroad immediately. Just suppose, Kate, you had cared for him as much as he tried to make you, and as I am very much afraid many people think you do! No, a male flirt is my abhorrence, and Gordon is one *aux bouts des ongles*. I assure you, Lady Daventry—and you know she is not at all an ill-natured woman, or given to scandal—asked some very unpleasant questions. I really wish I had seen the gentleman; every one else seems to have seen him. He was in town only three days, and I really believe he called in person on every one else, though he only left a card for Sir Timothy. Did he call here?” Lady Henmarsh asked the question very suddenly; and as Katharine answered it, her cheeks reddened with a painful blush, which did not fade again during the interview.

“No, Lady Henmarsh, he did not.”

“Ah, I thought so. And now, my dear Kate, let me speak to you, as I feel, with the affection of

a mother and the experience of a woman of the world. Gordon Frere has treated you very ill ; he has exposed you to comments, very injurious and painful to any girl, still more so to a girl situated as you are. He might have made you miserable, as well as ridiculous, if he had succeeded in making you love him. Now you must defeat his unmanly triumph, and silence all the talk among our countless dear friends who are amusing themselves at your expense. Your being ill just now is peculiarly unfortunate ; I know they will say you are shutting yourself up, and doing the *Didone abbandonata*. You have rather unfortunately good health, Katharine, for this sort of thing, and have long defied hot suns and iced creams too successfully to escape suspicion by pleading them now. I really wish, my dear girl, you would come out for a drive ; there are still many people to see you —take an old woman's advice, Kate, and don't disdain precaution, because you are not conscious of its need. *No one* can afford to be laughed at ; and if you are wise, you will reject Mr. Gordon Frere's legacy of ridicule."

Lady Henmarsh spoke earnestly and with much mental trepidation. She had ventured very, very far; much farther than, when she entered Katharine's room, she had believed she would dare to venture, for she too knew that Katharine had what her father called "a devil of a temper;" and there were few things she would not have preferred to rousing it. But the silence of the girl, something of forlornness under her pride, the patience with which she had borne her first approaches, had given Lady Henmarsh courage, and Katharine's demeanour satisfied her that all her suspicions had been more than just, that she had loved Gordon Frere frankly, fully, and with all the truth and ardour which were characteristic of her better nature. A moment's silence ensued when she had ceased speaking, and then Katharine, stately, cold, and graceful, rose from her chair, and, placing her hand upon the bell to summon her maid, said:

"I appreciate your kindness and your advice, Lady Henmarsh. If you will come back for me in half an hour, I will go with you any where you

please. But—this subject must never be spoken of again between you and me.”

Katharine’s maid entered the room, and Lady Henmarsh left it, merely saying in an assenting tone, “Very well, my dear,” and descended the stairs to the hall. There she met Mr. Guyon, who attended her to her carriage with great solicitude. A whisper only passed between them, for they treated servants with systematic caution. It was from Lady Henmarsh, who said :

“I don’t think you will have much trouble, Ned.”

Several persons of her acquaintance met Miss Guyon driving in the Park that afternoon, and had ample leisure to observe her amid the diminished throng. A few regarded her with curiosity—for though Lady Henmarsh had grossly exaggerated the facts, she and Gordon Frere had been “talked of” in their own set—many with admiration, and remarked that she looked particularly well and blooming, not at all cut up by the season. None knew that something had gone out of the beautiful face that was never to return to it—that

the woman they admired that day was not the same they had been accustomed to see and to admire, but who was now a thing of the past, never more to have any terrene existence.

“Katharine,” said Mr. Guyon to his daughter on the following day, as she sat opposite him at breakfast, while he furtively watched her countenance from behind the defence of a convenient newspaper, “I have something to say to you.”

“Have you, papa? What is it?”

She looked at him uninterested and unconcerned. Mr. Guyon threw down his newspaper, left his chair, and took up a position on the hearth-rug suggestive of wintry weather. He felt and he looked awkward; he cleared his throat, and pulled at the blue-silk ribbon which encircled it, as though its pressure incommoded him. His daughter did not move, and the expression of her face was still uninterested, unconcerned.

“Yes, Katie,” he recommenced. “I have indeed, my dear, something very particular to say to you. I don’t often speak seriously to you, you

know, and never bother you about business. So you must not think I want to bother you now, and you must really attend to me."

"If it's about going out of town, papa, I really don't care where—"

"No, no, Kate, it's not that," said her father, interrupting her; "it's nothing so easily settled as that. The fact is—Kate," he said abruptly, and in a changed tone, "what do you think of our friend Streightley?"

"What do I think of Mr. Streightley, papa? I can hardly tell you; I don't think I know,—I don't think I have any thoughts about him. But what has that to do with any thing important or particular that you want to speak to me about?"

"It has every thing to do with it, Kate. Robert Streightley is the best friend I have in the world, and he is the best fellow I know."

Katharine looked at her father with surprise. She was very far from understanding him perfectly; but she certainly had a notion that Mr. Streightley did not resemble the sort of person to whom she would have expected her father to apply the fa-

vourite epithet, "good-fellow." She said nothing, however; and Mr. Guyon, watching her more eagerly than he suffered his features to tell, continued :

"I need not weary you by explaining the services Streightley has done me in detail, but I must tell you that I have been unfortunate in money matters in many ways ; I have trusted friends, and been deceived—" again Katharine's face expressed surprise, which she certainly felt, and yet would have been puzzled to explain. "I have been speculating, and have been ill-advised ; the result has been disastrous ; in short, Katie, I must have gone to the wall had it not been for Robert Streightley."

Katharine had become exceedingly pale now, and she fixed her eyes on her father with more steadiness than he liked. He leaned his right elbow on the chimney-piece, and kept his right hand hovering about his mouth and chin, ready to cover an undesirable expression of candour or embarrassment.

"Do you mean that Mr. Streightley has lent you money, papa?" asked Katharine.

"Yes, my dear, he has, and large sums too; and I have lost so heavily by those speculations I mentioned, that I cannot pay him without the greatest inconvenience, indeed almost ruin. He does not know how I am situated; and of course it would be painful and humiliating to me to tell him, unless I could also tell him the best news he could hear, Kate—"

"What is that, papa?" she asked, perfectly without suspicion. Mr. Guyon found his change of attitude very useful now, and he critically examined his boots before he said:

"Well, my dear—I know you will be surprised, and indeed I was astonished when he mentioned the subject to me. The best news that Mr. Streightley could hear, Katie, would be that you had consented to become his wife—" and at the last words he raised his head and looked at her. Katharine started up, and exclaimed:

"Me! I!—O papa, what are you saying?"

Her father approached her, put one arm round her waist, and took her hand in his. He seldom caressed his daughter, and she instinctively shrunk

from the encircling arm, as if a danger threatened her; but he held her firmly, and she stood still and listened.

“ I daresay you can’t understand it, Kate, but it’s quite true for all that; and you know you are a doosid sensible girl, and doosid lucky too, I can tell you.” Mr. Guyon was recovering himself. “ Now look here. You’ve always lived like a lady—a long way better than many ladies, by Jove—and you don’t know what difficulties and poverty mean; and it will be your own fault if you do know now, or ever. You’ve no fortune, Kate; and a girl who hasn’t can’t choose for herself—that’s a fact. Men can’t and won’t marry without money; and though you don’t know much of the world, except the ball, supper, promenade, and park side of it, Katie, I daresay you know enough of it not to deny *that*. You don’t know much of Streightley; and I daresay he’s not the sort of fellow you would fancy if you *did* know ever so much of him. But then, you see, the sort of fellow you would fancy can’t marry you, because you have no money, or won’t, which comes to the same thing,—at all

events doesn't—" Here Katharine released herself, and sat down. Still she turned her white face and attentive eyes steadfastly upon him, and showed no sign of emotion, save the occasional twitching of the hand which she laid upon the table. Immensely reassured by her quietness, Mr. Guyon went on, quite cheerily :

" It's all nonsense thinking about love-matches in these days ; and indeed at any time I don't think they turned out well. Now, Kate, this is the real fact. If you don't marry Streightley, who is a first-rate fellow, and immensely rich, and ready to do all sorts of generous and noble things, in addition to giving me time to look about me until I can pay him the money I owe him, absolute ruin is staring me in the face, and you too. Don't speak, Kate ; don't say any thing in a hurry ; and don't say I ask you to marry Streightley for my sake ; but just listen to the alternative. Well, suppose that you determine not to accept Streightley ;—and remember, beautiful and admired as you are, he is the first man who has ever asked you to marry him—a pretty strong proof, I think, of the

truth of my statement that men won't marry without money, especially if you will take the trouble to count up the number of ugly heiresses married since you have been out, and to several of your own admirers too;—we all go to smash here; I must shift for myself the best way I can—get off abroad, and escape imprisonment; though I can't escape disgrace—and never hope to show my face in England again. And as for you, Katie, don't think me hard or cruel—I must tell you the truth; I must tell you the whole truth, that you may know what you really reject or accept. I see nothing for you but becoming a companion to a lady—which I take it is the most infernal kind of white slavery going—or being dependent on the charity of Lady Henmarsh. You can't live with your aunt, because she is going to live with her daughter; and you can't come abroad with me, for many reasons, the chief being that I could not afford to take you. Cousin Hetty is very pleasant and nice now, and a capital chaperone; but you are, as I said before, a doosid sensible girl, and I daresay you can guess what cousin Hetty would be

to a poor relation, with a shady father, living on her charity,—so I won't dwell upon *that*."

He paused a little, but still she did not speak. Still she looked at him, her face white, her lips firmly closed, and the hand on the table twitching occasionally. Once or twice there was a sound in her throat as if she swallowed with difficulty, but she uttered no word. Mr. Guyon felt exceedingly hot and uncomfortable, but he went on, less glibly perhaps, and looking rather over than at her.

"The other side of the medal is this, Katie. You have the opportunity of marrying a rich man, in an honourable and advancing position, so desperately in love with you that you may choose your own manner of life. He is very good-looking and well-bred, and I don't see any reason why you may not like him quite well enough to get on with him as happily as any woman gets on with any man. Let me tell you, my dear, the strength of your position will be incalculably increased by your not being in love with him; in nine cases out of ten a woman in love with her husband bores him horribly, and brings out all the bad points in his

temper, which she might never find out, or at all events might easily manage, otherwise. You will have every material of reasonable happiness, and the power of indulging your tastes—and they are not economical, Kate. And now choose for yourself, and remember I don't play the sentimental parent, and urge you to this for my sake. We have always been good friends, Katie, but I don't expect a sacrifice from you; and I don't talk the absurd nonsense of representing a splendid offer like this, involving advantages which no girl in London knows better than yourself how to appreciate, as a fearful trial, affording you an opportunity of performing martyrdom to filial duty."

There was a coarse sneer in his voice, which he would have done well to repress, which was dangerous; but his temper was getting the better of his prudence. Katharine shrunk from the tone, and felt even in that moment of tumultuous emotion that the love she had for her father was but a weak affection. It was dying while he spoke, dying as her fresh knowledge of him was born; it would soon be dead she knew, with that

other love now for ever lost to her ; and only the hopeless pain, the weariness of contempt, would live where the two honest natural affections had sprung up, to be blighted. Mutual avoidance, something like mutual fear, was in the faces that looked at each other, and were so strangely like, now that the expression of each was one of its worst. With no enviable sensations Mr. Guyon waited for Katharine to speak. She rose from her seat before she did so ; then she said :

“ Mr. Streightley does not imagine that I entertain any feeling of regard for him, I suppose ? ”

This was a puzzling question, and Mr. Guyon allowed the embarrassment it caused him to be evident.

“ Except as a friend of mine, and— ” he stammered.

“ I understand, ” said Katharine, and she bent her head slowly and emphatically. “ And he is willing to purchase me on those terms ? It is well the bargain should be distinctly understood. ”

If Mr. Guyon had ever understood, had ever

learned to understand his daughter, these words must have taught him how great a change had passed upon her. They would have been impossible of utterance to the Katharine of three weeks ago; but a wide gulf, never to be spanned, of pain and injury lay between that time and the present. He felt afraid of the girl; but rallying his courage for a decisive effort, he said:

“Your answer, Katharine; you see the case as clearly as I do;—what am I to say to Mr. Streightley?”

“Nothing,” she answered, “but that I will see him myself. Tell him to come here this evening, to-morrow, any time you please,—I will see him, I will hear what he has to say. There must be no mistake in *this* case, no self-deception, no mutual deception. The truth is not beautiful or holy, but at least it shall be told.”

She left the room as soon as she had spoken the last words. Her father remained as she had left him; an ugly dark shadow had spread itself over his face. After some minutes he looked up, shrugged his shoulders, and strolled over to one

of the windows. He looked out idly for a little, then roused himself, and went into his own room. There he wrote two letters, bestowing considerable time and pains on the first, which was addressed to Robert Streightley, but scribbling the other off with careless rapidity. It bore Lady Henmarsh's name upon the envelope, and contained the following words :

“DEAR HETTY,—I have done my part of this business, and *I think* things look well. As to my having very little trouble, perhaps if you had heard and seen, you would have continued to think so ; but I should be devilish sorry to do it over again.—Yours, E. G.”

Katharine did not appear at dinner that day, and Mr. Streightley partook of that meal, for which he had a very moderate appetite, *tête-à-tête* with her father. When the two gentlemen adjourned to the drawing-room, Katharine was seated by the window, and they could hardly discern her features, so rapidly was the autumn twilight deepening into darkness. While Mr.

Guyon was calling rather angrily for lights, Robert Streightley advanced towards the motionless figure, awaiting his greeting; and as Mr. Guyon heard his daughter reply to the confused and agitated words which Robert addressed to her, he started at the changed tone of the voice, as if a stranger had spoken.

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